



VNH GALLERY

# NICOLAS ROGGY

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108 RUE VIEILLE DU TEMPLE 75003 PARIS  
SEPTEMBER 6 - 22, 2018

VNH Gallery is delighted to announce the solo exhibition of the artist Nicolas Roggy (September 6 - 22, 2018). Nicolas Roggy was born in Le Blanc (France) in 1980. He currently lives and works in Paris (France).

Gallien Déjean: The unfinished orange painting [2] reminds me of something. An older work that you've already shown?

Nicolas Roggy: Yes, this is the third I've done. I showed one at Sundogs<sup>1</sup> and another was presented for the Prix Prat<sup>2</sup>. It begins with a rather wonky motif. Generally, it's a sort of scythe or hook. Here, actually, I think it's a bit Evil Dead ... You might not see it, but it reminds me of the hand coming out of the ground. I'd like to accentuate that, at some point, to have a scene. I need something simple. You know, generally, it's always a kind of volume signified by the motif—the motif that turns into the volume ...

GD: Does this principle hold good for all your paintings?

NR: No, I'm talking about the three I've done with this type of motif. I begin with the motif, which I paint thickly. Then I add a second element. Sometimes, for instance, eyes. At Sundogs, it was a melting face. I always try to have a figurative element in the composition. This is the third I've painted and I have the feeling I'm beginning to get more comfortable. In certain places, I mask out the motif, then I overlay a coat of rather "textured" paint. So there's a void in the painting into which the motif passes and becomes something else ... That's why I say that I paint figuratively: because in the format there is a form that becomes different. It's as though it were a figure, a sculpture, or an undefined space in which the motif reappeared. Generally, I also add a second motif superimposed over the first—a hook, for instance.

GD: Do you often return to a motif or a system from one show to another? Could we say that your work includes series?

NR: Yes, I like to set myself several themes to explore at the same time. I believe that I told myself, when I had my first show at Triple V, that every painting I showed then could be the beginning of series that would be continued later. A starting point I would return to and explore until it was played out, giving it a different scenography in every show. The vitrines I include in my paintings could be considered another of those series. For the VNH show, there was also the phase of constructing the shaped canvases in aluminum that constitute a new theme in my work—which was almost a trap, although I believe I'm just starting to understand it ...

GD: A trap?

NR: For instance, that one [3]—it's got me trapped big time. It's incredible, this is the second time I've started over and I can't make it work! There was a point I thought of fixing rubber bands all over it because I just couldn't paint. And yet I made lots of preparatory drawings, like this one [*he takes out a sheet of A4 Canson paper*]. Every time, I tell myself it might work—but this one, for instance, is too gory, it looks like a chopped-up head ...

GD: Are there sources that inspire you when you begin to conceive a painting? Do you work with images?

NR: Of course, I sometimes use visual sources. They're a material like any other. In this show, for instance, I was inspired by Zdzisław Beksinski<sup>3</sup> when I painted the double vitrine [4]. The painting of the hand holding the flower [9]

1. Sundogs (Paris) organized a solo show by Nicolas Roggy in April 2018, entitled *Upper Bodies*.

2. Nicolas Roggy won the Jean-François Prat prize in 2018.

3. Zdzisław Beksinski (1929-2005) is Polish figurative painter. His oeuvre is characterized by a tendency to onirism and to distopian surrealism.



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as inspired by Francesco del Cossa's retable of Saint Lucy<sup>4</sup>. That said, I don't think it's important to address the issue of references in this interview. In the end, all the elements are right there in front of us. The flower is in the head, the flower has two eyes: everything is there to be seen.

GD: Without pressing the issue of references, I still think it's worthwhile to point out that, in addition to the technical processes that allow you to produce your works, there is also an imagery that comes into play at the different stages of production and reception of your painting. I'd noticed, as a matter of fact, that you often spoke of your paintings in a very imagistic way.

NR: That's true, there is an imagery. It's like the "black tree," the hooks you see here aren't really hooks, or altogether horns. As a matter of fact, when I built the thing with my father, we called it successively "the horns," "the cactus," "the coatrack," and so on. Nothing is set in stone, because it all starts with nothing more than a preliminary sketch. That allows a non-authoritarian, unfixed dimension within the conventional space of the painting. Everyone is free to see what they want and enrich the multiple imagery that feeds my painting. That being said, to go back to that "black tree," it could be a cactus or whatever you want, but there is still an Art Deco aspect that makes the motif an object rather than an image.

GD: Does this dialectic between image and object in your practice derive from an interest in ornament?

RG: Yes, absolutely. That's why Marc Camille Chaimowicz's work interests me so much. But let's be clear, when I speak of ornament, I don't mean "prettiness"!

GD: Of course, ornament isn't "pretty." It was puritan Modernism that declared ornament superfluous and to be forbidden. But ornament, in fact, is the beginning of modernity. We could even say that ornament is at the origin of the history of modern art, with historians like Gottfried Semper and Alois Riegl who, working on ornament, drew away from a concept of art history that was literary, positivist (the study of facts), or idealist (the study of great metaphysical concepts). They forged a new discipline at the end of the 19th century: formalism (reoriented to the study of works and forms). What interests me here is that ornament is centrifugal, drawing in elements that are peripheral, or considered so, to the field of academic art: the minor arts, non-European arts, vernacular practices, processes of technological delegation, functionalism ... It's no accident that your painting dares to go in certain directions—carpets, weaving, glassware, furniture (the valises, tables, or vitrines that you make)—while still remaining painting ...

NR: You're right to connect these aspects of my work. What's new in this show are the vitrines, a project that grew out of a vitrine-table that I made a few years ago. It was first shown empty at the Martos Gallery stand at Art Brussels in 2015, then Tenzing Barshee used it to show works and documents at Treize in 2016<sup>5</sup>. I like this alternation between functionality and inutility. For this new show, I wanted to emphasize the inutility of the vitrine, so that it became a support in the same way as the shaped canvases. For the vitrine in the painting of the hand holding the stalk, I was inspired by a case that I saw in the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. But I emptied it out. There is nothing to be seen except the ornamentation of the glass, produced with the glassmaker Stéphane Pelletier, and a glass stalk inset in the vitrine. This inutility—this absence—also appears in the shaped canvases in aluminum, as though certain parts of the conventional pictorial support were lacking. As for the yellow shaped canvas, there's no reason for it to be in two parts. And yet, the fact that it can be taken apart and that in the interstice of the separation the wall behind it is seen gives it something like «capacity.» This ambivalence between inutility and capacity also appears in what I call the "prostheses," those oblong aluminum forms that accompany two paintings in this show.

GD: I have the impression that this show bears witness to a rupture in your work. It seems to me that last year you went through a period of latency and exploration that resulted in the show you had at Sundogs in April ...

NR: Sundogs was clearly exploration! Anyway, at the beginning, the paintings weren't even meant for that show.

GD: ... with smaller formats that seemed to be the result of that period of exploration—and the starting point for new methods of working (the use of aluminum, the construction of shaped canvases, the vitrines, compositions less obviously "Op Art" ...) that are developed in the VNH show.

I'd like to go back to the stages you go through in producing your pieces and particularly to the preparatory drawings that you make before each painting. Why is this necessary?

NR: It's in the logical continuity of what we were saying at the beginning of our conversation, the construction phase: to bring in a motif, one must construct something to receive it. The drawing phases do that. For instance, the first steps of this show were drawings of the silhouettes of the shaped canvases in aluminum. The ornamental and decorative

4. Francesco del Cossa, *Sainte Lucie*, circa. 1473-1474, tempura on poplar wood, National Gallery of Art, New York.

5. *Le Mérite 2014-2016*, organized by Tenzing Barshee, Treize, Paris.



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dimension began there: in the construction, in one stroke, of these empty formats.

GD: Is that the first thing you do? Do you begin by drawing the contour of the painting?

NR: Yes; but especially for this show. This is something new.

GD: When I first became interested in your methods of production, there was a period when I found it almost bizarre that you did preparatory drawings. I pictured your paintings as a series of experiments, the results of a succession of technical processes—which seemed to contradict the existence of a preparatory drawing. I didn't understand that separation between concept and realization. And then the contradiction disappeared once I understood that your drawings functioned a bit like the cartoons for a tapestry: your practice fed on the distance to be passed from the linear graphic structure of the drawing to the complex infrastructures of your paintings (the mingling of pictorial layers, superimpositions, maskings, understructures, sandings-down, etc.). It's not coincidental that you planned a while ago to go to Nepal to have carpets made. There is a double composition in your paintings: the graphic composition, from your drawings, which operates on the two-dimensional plane of the canvas, and the infrastructural composition that develops in depth in the layers of color. And I have the impression that this composition in depth is truly painterly (despite anything Greenberg may have said about pictorial planarity ...).

NR: It's true, my drawings could be compared to tapestry cartoons. My practice is situated in the passage from drawing to pictorial technique. That said, for a while now I've begun to understand things starting with the preparatory phase. I use a new way of drawing that better integrates issues of superimposition and overlaying. I love ballpoint pens, for instance, because they don't make too thick a line and yet, sometimes, they're a little messy, they make spots. And that's when it becomes reflexive. But there's always a moment when I leave off drawing in order to reinterpret the work in volume.

GD: How does that go?

NR: Here, for instance, [he shows a half-finished canvas] I glued on a foam rubber masking, on which I draw freehand the forms I will later cut out with a utility knife. I can also pre-cut lines in the masking with a machine. Then I add successive layers of paint, I overlay, I sand down, I crimp, etc. To go back to what we were saying earlier, it's by transforming paint into volume that it becomes a material for reflection. To do that, I like to push my favorite paintings or images as far as they can go, to pair them with other things. The viewer isn't necessarily aware of it, but in the end the work is the result of complex stages of pairing of content, form, motif, structure, etc.

GD: That reminds me of a phrase of Gilbert Simondon's: "Work must be recognized as a phase of technicity, not technicity as a phase of work; technicity is the whole, of which work is a part, not the reverse". In a way, that reminds me of your painting's relationship to technique. What we see in your painting is not the finished product, but the production process of which it is the result. We could even say, after Simondon, that each painting is the serial element of a greater production process. As though you were the operator of a technical sequence, Painting, of which you were trying to exhaust the possibilities, painting after painting.

Interview conducted by Gallien Déjean in Nicolas Roggy's studio at La Courneuve in August 2018.

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