

## Michel Parmentier *Calques – Tracing Papers, 1989-1991*

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Extract from Guy Massaux, “[tracing paper] October 12 1989 – June 14 1991,” in *Michel Parmentier, December 1965 – November 20 1999, A Retrospective* (New York: Ortuzar Projects and Paris: Editions Loevenbruck, 2019), p. 163. Text revised to accompany the exhibition “Michel Parmentier, *Calques – Tracing Papers, 1989-1991*,” Paris, galerie Loevenbruck, November 29 2019 – January 18 2020.

1989

[tracing paper]  
October 12, 1989 –  
June 14, 1991

After the works on paper, in which the *degree zero of painting* (of the gesture of painting) proved fertile but also, to say the least, problematized by Parmentier, the artist started using tracing paper, a translucent and semi-transparent support.

1990

Tracing paper leaves the work's support visible<sup>1</sup> and its transparency makes this an active part of the conditions of showing and perceiving. Its degree of opacity veils the wall but does not conceal it.

The first works on tracing paper with rubbed charcoal<sup>2</sup> are *9 décembre 1989 (December 9, 1989)* and *14 décembre 1989 (December 14, 1989)*. In both, the charcoal is applied with the same circular movement, but the density is different in each work.<sup>3</sup> Parmentier even saturates and exhausts the transparency of the tracing paper. On the surface, the rubbing makes evident the relief of the folds situated inside the apparatus (*24 décembre 1989 (December 24, 1989)*). In many of the tracing paper works, the relief and grain of the support (panel, wall) on which the work is produced appear on the surface, the support being literally *traced [calqué]* by the rubbing of the medium (graphite, charcoal, pastel, oil-bar) and the pressure exerted on the strips.

1992

In the first works in white pastel, the traces are “penciled and rubbed” (*13 décembre*

1993

*1989 (December 13, 1989)*), “with plats not rubbed” (*18 décembre 1989 (December 18, 1989)*), “neutral with plats not rubbed” (*5 janvier 1990 (January 5, 1990)*), and “with plats scribbled and erased” (*20 février 1990 (February 20, 1990)*).

The term *plats* (“flats”) is applied to the pastel sticks and oil bars that Parmentier cuts into regular cylinders that are between 1.5 and 5 cm long, depending on the medium used, and then split lengthways in order to obtain two half-cylinders each with one flat side. Painting “with flats” means applying the flat side to the support, thus obtaining a regular trace of equal width. Starting with *6 mars 1991 (March 6, 1991)*, a work that Parmentier describes as “lines with almost joined and vertical *plats*,” the latter reintroduces the notion of “*traits*” (strokes, marks) in white pastel applied *à plats* with the cut side of the pastel. Each stroke is applied/traced beside and after another stroke, “almost joined and vertical,” from top to bottom, and of equal length, and from left to right, so as to cover the whole surface, as in *5 avril 1991 (April 5, 1991)*.

1994

1995

Subsequently, the same principle is applied using sticks of oil bar in *6 mars 1991 (March 6, 1991)*; *5 mai 1991 II (May 5, 1991 II)*; *5 mai 1991 IV (May 5, 1991 IV)*; and gray pastel: *19 avril 1991 (April 19, 1991)*; *25 avril 1991 (April 25, 1991)*; *28 avril 1991 (April 28, 1991)*; and *4 juin 1991 II (June 4, 1991 II)*.

1996

Despite the seeming seriality of the work, each new piece is seen not as part of an ensemble but as a singular value, and several works may be dated to the same day. For example, *5 mai 1991 (May 5, 1991)*, from I to V, is a series of variations on the same gesture (“8 sequences. white oil-bar/tracing paper 90/95, almost joined and vertical strokes, 304 x 300, Brussels”), with the same paper, the same formats, and the same place<sup>4</sup> in a set of five; with the indication “idem” written in the notebook as many times as the work is executed. It is the same for the works that are dated *31 mai 1991 (May 31, 1991)*, from I to V, which were all produced for the “Buren Parmentier” exhibition, held in Brussels at the Palais des Beaux-Arts between June 7, 1991 – July 20, 1991.

1997

The works on tracing paper end with *6 juin 1991 (June 6, 1991)*, a “tracing paper folded and left blank, then unfolded.” These work shows the tracing paper “blank,” with only the folds and the marking from the date stamp.

1998

1999

<sup>1</sup> The works on tracing paper and calque polyester are conceived in order to be exhibited only on white walls.

<sup>2</sup> These details are written by Parmentier in the notebook, in which he records details of his works.

<sup>3</sup> *24 décembre 1989 (December 24, 1989)* and *14 février 1990 (February 14, 1990)*. The latter is the largest work that Parmentier left us. It comprises an ensemble of 36 strips in a progressive sequence from 1 to 8. Apart from the first strip, which situates the hanging of the ensemble, each sub-ensemble comprises between 2 to 8 strips. When hung, these sub-ensembles are separated by the width of one strip (37.5 cm), extending to 16.875 meters long in total. It was made for the exhibition “Buren Parmentier” at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels.

<sup>4</sup> Starting in April 1991, Parmentier traveled regularly to Brussels to prepare the exhibition “Buren Parmentier.” He completed a number of his works in the studio of Guy Massaux at 123, rue Marconi, Forest (Brussels (Belgium)).