

A World in “Graphs”.

An exhibition review by Gregor Nusser
(Noema Art & Asset Management) of
Christophe de Landsheer's show at the
Magpie International Art Gallery in Marbella,
Spain (26 April – 7 June 2019)

Has anybody ever seen a picture image of a reasoning or a thought?

To introduce you to Christophe's “Graphs”, as he calls his works, is a challenge because of their labyrinthine character. I will use five notions: “Concept”, “Process”, “Verdichtung”, “Decorum” and “Humour” for this purpose.

1. Concept in Art / Conceptual Art

Now here we get to one of the first difficult words that art historians and art critics love to bombard us with... In my view conceptual art is based on a reflection, or a thought, that is then transformed into an object/artwork. This is contrary to the idea that art should represent an event, a situation or a story.

Let me give you an example:

What was Claude Monet's main artistic concern or idea? It was to paint light ...

He was not really interested in the landscapes, buildings, coastlines, cityscapes or figures that would appear as his subject matter, they were a mere pretext to paint light ... Had he been even more radical, I believe he would have ended up painting a canvas in pure white... simply light.

Many people will object that they too could paint a plain canvas white and that they would have painted light, but that does not make Maleviches out of them.

To my understanding what distinguishes a worthwhile art practice in general from self-indulgence are the artist's decisiveness, determination and discipline.

And this applies to conceptual arts as well.

Decisiveness: as an artist making a decision is key, as it requires bringing a specific concept or thought into form.

Determination: must be applied to shape the transformative act.

Discipline: is necessary in order to not deviate from decision and determination.

Christophe fulfills these criteria with ease, thereby providing his works with a uniquely recognisable quality.

2. Process

Christophe's concern is not with painting light,

but with the rendering of ever changing activity in all its aspects: the way we experience, undergo and try to manage it by formalising processes.

So what do these terms really mean? A simple explanation of what a process is would go as follows. Imagine you decide to go and buy bread (point A). One could then describe or document all the successive steps between point A and bringing the bread back home (point B). Well, Christophe is interested in what happens between A and B, not in A and B themselves...

He explores the way in which we think about activity, the manners in which it can be represented, and what these representations reveal about the nature of activity.

Activity is diverse (buying bread, lying, mending teeth, composing a poem, ...) and cannot be revealed uni-dimensionally using linear text or technocratic or scientific methods and tools. This is where the next level of complexity of the "graphs" comes in ...

3. "VerDichtung"

This is probably the most essential aspect of his work: it is best translated into English as "compression", but this surely does not sound as wonderful as in German, because in that idiom the concepts contains the word "Dichtung", which means poetry.

To put this activity of sourcing and compressing of thoughts, reflections, schemes, models, maps, ... under words is difficult. The nearest notion Christophe refers to is "spatialisation", a term he found in the works of the french philosopher Henri Bergson.

For Bergson spatialisation occurs when consciousness grasps, or selects an instant (or an event) from the flow of duration. Duration is conceived as a continuous flux of unpredictable new experiences. We are the sum of these past experiences confronted to the present by the necessity to act. We are memory confronted to the present. As events vanish, they are absorbed into our being.

So how does the artist then arrive at a physical work filled with the compressed, distilled and vanishing content of his themes and reflections?

4. Decorum

The works are composed of various kinds of - lets call them - media (ie. paint, ink, pencil, paper, etc.)

In my view his foremost technique is that of text

or handwriting, but not a very common kind of handwriting. It is almost calligraphic... full of rhythm, but also equilibrium... full of flow and at the same time constant and repetitive in its formality. Thinking and perceiving are merged into graphical images that can be read as words and sentences. But these graphical images also immediately become elements of the general images that are the "graphs".

He also integrates other types of graphical elements such as: diagrams, timelines, flowcharts, mind maps, etc. And although they have a function in the works' arguments, they also embellish the picture plane.

The "graphs" also include elements of collage, a very "modern style" technique. He uses it a bit like Schwitters or Picasso. By integrating everyday imagery the artist very subtly includes what I would call "left-overs or debris of contemporary life", giving the artwork another touch of personal aura. The function of the collage elements is usually not illustrative of the work's subject matter. They are not illuminations of the text – on the contrary -, they seem to have been craftily positioned to have quite the opposite effect: to divert the attention away from the text.

5. Humor / Nonsense

Well hidden in between serious texts and academic analysis, i.e. lists, process maps, diagrams, etc. another important characteristic of Christophe's work is to be discovered.

The artist uses irony and humour, sometimes even sarcasm as a means to simultaneously disturb and comfort.

The use of humour, irony or sarcasm in art is a widely used manner of uttering criticism and double sided comment. It is also a tactic artists use to modulate their position and seek protection against the beholder's excessively sharp or dogmatic judgments.

Christophe's humour mainly springs from self-relativisation and the continuous tension created by his consciousness of the thin line separating meaningful activity from futile non-sense.

To me, personally these graphs are little jewels of potent intellectual content paired with delicate decorum that always have the potential to cause a smile on the beholder's face.

In the history of art this is - to my knowledge - very, very rare....

