

Didier Boussarie

The spirit of lines

By Belinda Cannone

In the beginning there was white, reserve.

A reserve, filled with lines to come. Did the painter know that these lines would become artichoke, woman, mountain, bush?

In the beginning perhaps it all swarmed inside of him – a desire especially, a desire to fill the white sheet of paper or the canvas, placed on the ground or hanging on the wall, and him equipped with charcoal and brushes on long sticks, calm, concentrated, reserved no doubt.

In the beginning perhaps he had an idea brewing – one always imagines an idea being at the source of a drawing, that's already what the protagonists of the old dispute between colorists and draughtsmen in the 17th Century claimed – and then, stems began to dance, lines were placed, superimposed, always blacks (but surreptitiously mixed in were threads and fields of colour, umber and sienna, red ochre, yellow...) blacks then yet velvety, warm, matte, luminous, setting the whole page in tension, a twisted line here a taut one there, dense in that centre almost becoming a blotch, then from a plaiting a few light strands are released here – and there?

Listen here: on these papers and canvases, there are no gimmicks, no tricks, no "good ideas". Only the painter, his desire, his dance, and his secret reserve from which the figures of the world reinterpreted emerge. Figures of a colourist or a draughtsman? Hard to say. By growing denser the lines have become material, it's in this materiality that they affect us. Diderot called it "magic": this ability of the painted substance to touch us – to touch in us what, in order to go faster we can call *aesthetic sense* but which is also far more primitive than this expression suggests, and closer to a *visual touch*. Magic, with Boussarie, because we don't know how to describe the reason for the emotion felt at the sight of a warm black, a gold thread rubbing under a darker line, the entanglement that creates density and light. So we call it *magic*, as something inside of us - an archaic as much as a refined sense - jubilates at this captivating contemplation.

"One must always search for the desire of the line, where it wishes to enter or where to die away" (Matisse). Modesty of the hand which lets itself be guided by the line – the arm rather, as the hand is not sufficient to activate the long stick – and sincerity. The painter listens to what the line dictates, where it wants to surge, where it wants to vanish, and thus he discovers, line after line, what becomes of his reserve. Because, it is this which dispenses the white, which manifests the source, the void which was there and from which the world was born, from which the picture appeared. A negative to primitive darkness.

If, like Baudelaire, I judge the quality of a picture by the sum of daydreams it awakens in me, I must recognize the great richness of Boussarie's work which leads my imagination to wander.

Firstly: the sunflower and the artichoke are humble, though humble because they are simple flowers which don't have the same superb effusion as the peony or the refined luxury of the lily. They are barely flowers: edible plants, flowers not of adornment, but as dictated by this stage of nature's process. Moreover: dried flowers or becoming so, moribund flowers in their last breath and transient beauty. Thus time, intimately inscribed in these works, in the same way as the *instant* chosen by the painter, transforms these modest vegetations into authentic vanities.

Secondly: one can sense the human in these plants, secret references, suggested connivances, unsettling reminders. In this artichoke, a female head of hair. In these two sunflowers (frail stems supporting golden seeds which are bursting over), Christ and a thief on the cross: *ponens caput expiravit*, "head inclined he exhaled". In this swarm of sunflowers, a waiting assembly – it is as if I had stumbled across a confused rumor, I can guess the figures around which the others gather, I can grasp the random organization of the crowd. And then this one which comes towards us, a stiff blackening ball, has it abandoned that other, ghostly, barely perceptible figure in the background?

Thirdly: in this solitary curtsying sunflower, I gather a journey of scattered shooting stars. What these lines and strokes reveal is the world altogether. Linking each thing and all things in the cosmos. Is this great painting about branches, bushes, bird's skeleton petrified in flight? In this other one belonging to a series of mountains, a vulva appears to the eye that cares to linger. And there, a big shakeup on the ground produces the epiphany of a hill. Unless it is an anamorphosis of hair and shoulders stretched out on the sheet of paper? Can we be certain? As little as the chignon that strongly resembles a nest. Hence, the hill is like the bush which is like hair which is like the beloved woman. Without the artist's delicate and attentive gaze, without the hand which allows these secret analogies to take shape, these elements would remain disconnected. Art does not render the visible but renders visible, said Klee.

Fourthly: analogies, but no transposition, no metaphor, the painter has well depicted what he saw in front of him (were it within him), women flowers mountains bushes. Yet his way of drawing our attention to one part of the object (the hair rather than the woman, the corolla rather than the flower) produces what one could call an artistic language of metonymy.

Same black, same yellow, same shambolic presence (a riot of details) on an evanescent support (body, stem, background) altogether the same effort to appear, no doubt, but here you see a deployed head of hair coming alive above barely suggested shoulders; there, a corolla filled with dried seeds becoming more intense above a sketched stem; there also, a cluster of branches has the honor of detaching itself from a hazy background. Is it not this effort of apparition which leaves its mark in the shadows surrounding the figure? It's as if it were born of its own desire, from the initial draft slowly taking shape, the pin head loaded thread by thread, stroke by stroke, thickening its ball up until, finally, it becomes.

No doubt one can argue that since his early productions, Boussarie has always sought to capture apparitions – their surge. For example, there were bodies transpiring from a canvas where they could barely be seen - *vera icona* -, black boxes with wired screening where painted flesh, observed as in close up, made us experience all its humility, palpitation, substance and spirit – a feeling of flesh -, there were branches organized in a cluster which led beyond, rendering both a geometric and a sensual pleasure, also there were photos where body parts were combined with painting on wood giving rise to analogies of forms and materials...The list of his many attempts at fixing apparitions is long.

Returning to this series, if I try to understand the powerful and delicate appeal of his drawings where modest subjects look just placed there, alone or alongside each other, I am compelled to put forward a notion of *point of intensity*: in the apparent disorder and hazard of the composition according to which the casual desire of the painter's gaze elects only one aspect of the object, we nevertheless find organization. For the blotches, cloudiness, light hints and shady drips often converge towards the centre of the figure where black is strengthened, reaching a point of intensity which, attracting our attention, gives rise to an illusory swelling of the sheet of paper like a peak straightening out a sheet (perceptive). Extreme rejoice.

In order to catch a spirit (the spirit of an artichoke or a chignon), it is necessary to invent a form. Spirits can only be captured in beautiful and intense forms. Sometimes, a painter tries one form but the spirit does not come there. So the work *says nothing*. And the spectator remains voiceless, not knowing how to explain why the magic does not take place, as it is almost as difficult to explain this as it is to explain the contrary. When I delight in the contemplation of this brotherhood of six or seven artichokes placed side by side (in the centre, two lean in towards each other), when I admire the delicate meddle of lines composed by their heads and the multiplication of points of intensity (six or seven), I understand that Boussarie never ceased to incite the spirits to come live in his drawings, and they came.