

## **INTERVIEW WITH LE PARATONNERRE**

### **LP : Throughout your career, have you found more joy than hard work ?**

Definitely more joy, because the “hard” work in the studio is very satisfying and I can always adapt it to my needs at best. For me, making art means being able to define important decisions for my life myself. And if I have the choice, I naturally choose joy rather than suffering.

### **LP : Is the daily life (bread, toilet paper roll, sneakers,...) the most inspiring universe ?**

What is everyday life? For each and every one of us, everyday life is life itself. Everyday life is not just the things around us, but also our friends, family and the news. Everyday life in society is globalized. We act locally but we think globally. I focus on the small things of our globalized world. They are always present and as such easy to localize. In this respect, I visualize myself by observing them closely. Reflecting on the world through painting also quickly leads me to meta-levels.

### **LP : Do you exactly copy the object or finally you add some tiny personal details in the painting ?**

When I select objects and then paint them, I always do so within the scope of my possibilities - and these are of course limited because I am a limited being. That's why Kant spoke of the “thing in itself”, which is somehow outside our reachability and can only be perceived subjectively. I do look closely, but I don't paint from a photograph. I observe the things themselves, which are always present in my studio. So I transfer three dimensions into two, always, as I said, aware of the limits of my ultimately subjective perception. Although I am in the same room as the thing, I have to reduce it to one moment of time, one perspective and one dimension less for the picture. Beyond that I zoom in a lot, which means that I have to start improvising quite quickly in the microcosm of the object's surface, because I can only penetrate it to a limited extent. So where I reach the limits of my perception, I have to use something to fill these supposed gaps. This, in turn, inevitably has to be something I know - and that is my painting. And my handling of time. Because the sum of my observations corresponds to the density of my paint application and so the quality of my painting results from the quantity of my observations. And these apply to both the object and the picture that is slowly emerging. So what I do is ultimately not objective at all, even if it may seem so at first. As I said, I make sure of the existence of things when I paint and yet I seek a general essence by painting them. Every thing in the picture is first and foremost a thing in the picture and not a “thing in itself”. I hope I have been able to answer your question.

### **LP : Do you feel your work is a reflection of Germany's daily life (streets, shops, restaurants,...) or is it more universal ?**

Of course I reflect on my life where I am right now. I am also a child of this globalized world. Viewers are allowed to assess how much Europe, how much Germany, how much Berlin or how much of themselves is in my pictures. We all have many identities. So my paintings are not only painted by someone who grew up in Germany, but also by a middle-aged, white man, married to an artist, with two children, who is interested in many other things in life besides art: society, body movement, sociology, philosophy, good food, music... In this respect, I think that all of this flows into my work and makes it universal.

### **LP : The object is permanently present with you. Is it a scientific approach ? Is it also a way of capturing reality ?**

My approach is phenomenological: I observe things, the world, my own and other processes, painting and its creative possibilities and try to be as unprejudiced as possible. In this respect, it is not a scientific approach, but certainly a philosophical one, i.e. a humanistic one. And of course I am interested in finding my way around this world and my place in it.

**LP : Is it more self-portraits (you also paint your reflect and it's your personal things) than 'still life' ?**

In a certain sense, every painting is actually a self-portrait. Because you are first and foremost the medium yourself, which then immortalizes itself in the medium of the picture using the medium of painting. The picture is what remains, the result of this process of immortalization. It is always a living process that requires many alert decisions, a process of an individual's mature freedom. My still lifes are therefore not as objective as they seem. And I see the small realistic self-portraits that can be recognized here and there in the objects primarily as references to my processes, because you don't see me there, but a reflection of everything that happened in the room in which the object was located so that this picture could be created at all: namely the painter and his studio, often even the picture itself with the painted object on it. This is a beautiful play with the levels of space and time. Everything seems so simple and yet is so complex.

**LP : What is the role of the colours ?**

Well, without colors there are no pictures and certainly no painting! If you look at my paintings, you can see that I don't just apply the paint "efficiently" to illustrate a picture. My paintings and my use of paint always serve to observe the object and the painting. At the same time, the observation also serves the colorfulness, because the many layers, which are also layers of time, create a great density of color. Viewed from close up, my pictures are actually always very colorful, even and especially those that initially appear to be gray. The colors are therefore never an end in themselves for me. The process of painting is complex and, at best, everything plays together.

**LP : Do you hear some sound or music when you work or see your paintings ? (Jazz, Beatbox,...) Can we listen to music when we see your artwork ? Which one ?**

I love music and I love to dance. I also like to name my exhibitions after music titles (I can't get no, One Step Beyond...). Music is very immediate in its effect. And there are some concepts that can be applied to both music and painting: Rhythm, tension, movement, structure, sound, even melody. The perception of pictures requires other senses, even if they can be very physical. As I see myself as a musical person, I think my musicality automatically flows into my painting processes and into the pictures. I used to paint objects that referred to music in great detail: Record players, music cassettes, boom boxes... Especially in my more recent paintings, in which the objects become increasingly independent, rhythm and movement take on greater and greater significance. My newer paintings are created in a process that I like to compare with jazz music: There is a score, but it leaves me a lot of room for improvisation. In the dissolution of its solidity, the painted "thing in itself", i.e. the supposed motif of the picture, transcends into something immaterial, which in any case has more to do with the perception of music today than with the painted objects.

**LP : What is the most exciting moment (pre-production, production or post-production when you exhibit your paintings) ?**

There is no such thing as a single moment: everything can be exciting at any time. With the more austere object paintings, there are certainly phases that drag on, but even then there are surprising insights. Developing an idea, thinking about the format, painting itself, which is never just painting itself, but always a reflection of past and current processes and structures, finishing, correcting, showing, staging and exhibiting, the social response to the picture - all this is exciting and often very satisfying. It is important to me that "unknown quantities" flow into the processes and so the processes on my newer pictures are much more open. I no longer know exactly what will happen beforehand and have to engage with the motifs in a completely different way. The defined precision of my pictures remains, but they now emerge from a kind of improvisation, detachment, independence. And as this is still quite new to me, I am much more curious to see how viewers will

react to it. So: I find my life with painting exciting on a large and small scale, even in the quiet phases, and I feel very privileged to be able to feel this way.

**LP : What do you want to paint now ?**

Last year I reinvented myself, so to speak, and didn't paint a single object, but rather « Scripture Paintings » and interpretations of pictures by old and new masters in the history of painting which I call « Painting Paintings » (Manet, Caspar David Friedrich, Caravaggio...). I have freed myself from some of my dogmas, above all the dogma that I should never, under any circumstances, use any original images, and have thus been able to greatly expand my repertoire. The “thing in itself” can now also be a term or an existing image or the photo of this image. My processes are now determined not by rigor, but by the pursuit of a certain diversity, within the limits of my possibilities, of course. If I were to paint a completely realistic picture today, it would be something new for me again, because it would behave differently in a new context than in the closed cosmos of a few years ago. I don't want to rule that out. The glass series, which now comprises 31 pieces, will certainly continue from time to time. I am currently preparing an exhibition that will take place towards the end of the year at the Haas Gallery in Zurich and I hope that I will surprise myself here and there on the short way there. First of all, I'm going to tackle two classics by Jan Vermeer. And then we'll see what happens. I always have a rough idea of an upcoming exhibition, but that's also in the process, like everything...