

Based on a few recent cliff paintings ...

It all started with a small painting completed in 2013, Guy de Malherbe himself entitles it *matrice* (the mother of origin). It had been painted “sur le motif” in Houlgate. It represents a crack in a cliff, a sort of cave. After a vacation in Dieppe last fall, Guy de Malherbe decided to rework on this *matrice* painting of 2013. This is a common principle known to many artists. They base their research through paintings of this nature; the *matrices*. Artists are regularly drawn back to them so as to improve and develop their work; these artworks condense the main aspects of their preoccupations. These are generic works.

This cliff at Houlgate isn't the same as those of Etretat where the artist also regularly worked. The exhibition presents their profound differences, sometimes in a juxtaposed manner: the frontality of the high walls of Etretat (layers of strata, the verticality consisted of the superposition of horizontal plans), the vertigo of the gulf, the gaze that loses itself in the depth of the dark triangle (painted in black yet also a combination of colours) of Houlgate. The cliff is no longer immobile, it's nearly soft, and it never stops to alter. It's made of clay and diverse fossils. This instability is a key factor for the practice of observation. When it's dry, the cliff cracks; when it's rainy, the cliff becomes muddy, collapses in certain places. So it adopts an organic being and character, very much alive. The cliff becomes a landscape in itself, and in perpetual movement; often, figures appear.

The first *matrice* is a painting on wood made in 2009. We can see in the painting, at the foot of the cliff, in a hollow, a pile of huddled up rocks. In the foreground, at the bottom right, a bigger rock spreads its blue shadow on a vividly yellow ground. This first *matrice* will generate a whole series of paintings representing bodies or fragments of bodies amongst the rocks, often in a retreating position, their curves embracing the contours of the landscape, absent faces, heads often missing, bodies sleeping, dozing, hiding, washed up, but taken in by the landscape.

So this is the story- or at least a part- of Guy de Malherbe's painting. The relationship between bodies - or figures - and the landscape. And this story is precisely about painting. And it's also the story of the art of painting. Indeed, Guy de Malherbe is the type of painter who very frequently connects with the old masters as much, and even more, as the contemporary ones. Strongly connected to this intimate understanding, he engages as much the composition as the colour or the texture of the painting. Like many of his seniors he upholds a very tight relationship with the subject - figures, portraits or landscapes. He paints on sight, or right after, back in his studio, and in the freshness of his memory. If not, he can always rely on his “sur le motif” paintings, already painted and accomplished. He resumes themes that we could consider as classic. Although, quite surprisingly, his art is also a form of abstraction; in the singularity of its compositions as well as in the use of colour – mostly large patches of the same colour, that are not “*aplats*,” because of the quality of the texture that livens the surface, and neither monochromes. Guy de Malherbe is one of those painters who has the ambition to make reality visible as well as bringing the painting to life. He knows because he is a painter, that the only way to remain loyal to the realm of reality, the only hope to transform reality into painting, to use Cézanne's famous formula, is to fully concentrate on the means it offers, to use all its faculties, while finding a texture and style that becomes his own. This is his sense of commitment. It's what he decided to do by committing himself entirely to this activity by reuniting the best conditions to work – a studio, time to concentrate and persevere in the discomfort of research, but also the jubilation created by the apparition of forms. But, let's get back to the figure. Did it completely disappear in the last paintings? If one looks closely, it hasn't. The figure is actually profoundly incorporated within the landscape. This crack in the cliff- hollow- shapes a figure, or more precisely a body. Reconciling figure with landscape is maybe one of the projects that the painter is secretly undertaking. A double project: pictorial of course and maybe existential in depth. There's a will to find a unity that is visible throughout Guy de Malherbe's paintings. Exposing the usual separations: figure/landscape, abstraction/figurative, drawing/colour, surface/depth, subject/form... The painting becomes the skin that reunites scattered pieces in one body. It's a texture that creates an exchange between the inside and the outside, it's a surface that breathes (quality of the brushstroke, the appearance of the otherwise hidden canvas): inhales, exhales, and perspires. It is the place and the vehicle of a reconstructed reality to grasp what can only be seen in a rediscovered unity. To become so, it doesn't ignore an initial separation, on the contrary, it distinguishes, clarifies, puts in order and in movement. Gazing at it, one finds the means to go back to arduous work – sometimes fruitful, often exhilarating – to give shape and sense to the visible world.

This is the description of his ambition. The impact of the painting, its echo, can be grand and also shake our common representations. Guy de Malherbe gives us the possibility to engage ourselves in a work of reconciliation with reality, because a painting can have the amazing capacity to reinforce awareness or simply resuscitate our desire to be aware.