

## Translations

*JEAN-PIERRE CRIQUI*

Jean Genet wondered what would have remained of a “Rembrandt torn into small and very uniform squares, and dumped into the toilet”. Less inclined to the metaphysical, or to provocation, Elisabeth Ballet asks herself what would happen to a figure – geometric motif, portion of space found ‘ready-made’ if it were set in motion across heterogeneous fields. From drawing toward sculpture, from volume toward flatness, from the full toward the empty (or the reverse), and, in general, from one work toward another, her activity is based accordingly on a principle of movement. The proposed pieces suggest various times, various states (in the sense that this word assumes in the vocabulary of etching), and offer themselves up to view as the elements of statement, rather than as isolated units. This concern for syntax already appears in all the works shown in 1988 at the Venice Biennale and called Ideas that the mind adds to those which are precisely signified by words. Each of the pieces making up the show was named by a fragment of this phrase – hence ideas, a sort of suspended niche bounding an unoccupied space (borrowing from an interior arrangement observed at a friend’s, somewhat in the same way that Jeanne, in the following year, included a Neapolitan colander in his composition), or by words, a large volume of black wood of complex shape, a combination of circle and quadrilateral prolonged by a curtain of walls. The sequencing of the works was this clear by itself, but generated a sort of enigma. Throughout this passage, we were given to read a saying by Diderot on geometry (to those which are precisely signified) and the viewer understood more or less confusedly that these four sculptures were intended to be organized according to an abstract tale. As in ancient arts of memory, which enabled a speaker to advance within his own speech like a visitor discovering the different parts of a house, something indicated here a family relationship or a complicity between the space and the language.

Although devoid of explicit linguistic references, an ensemble called Face-à-Main took up this logic of the outspreading and migration of figures. Six small geometric constructions, respectively called Moulding, Material, Drawing, Maquette, point of view and perspective and Colour, are fixed to the walls of a room whose centre is invaded by an enormous object with animated contours and with a truly ungraspable general configuration. This cumbersome thing, with a form nothing if not premeditated, is actually the result of the projection and the prolongation in the vertical axis of six satellite pieces. Elisabeth Ballet has exploited liaison, punctuation, in brief, “phrasing” (and the musical connotation is not inappropriate) to unite these sculptures into a global form. This is baptized Model, which implies a certain sense of irony or a taste for paradox, because this “model” only appears upon the completion of a series of operations: it is a drop (what drops from a process), a precipitate, and not just any point of departure.

In Suite for Face-à-Main, done only recently for Kerguéhennec Exhibition, six separate sculptures – four on the wall, two placed freely on the ground – produce, not a volume, but a trace. On the Road, an associated line drawing on canvas, 11,5 metres long and also placed on the ground, abuts the horizontal pieces surrounding it in a sort of exploded view that brings the sides of each to the plane. A strange object, between diagram and painting, between outline and puzzle, that defies classification and which concentrates diverse problems of reading. In a wood, for example, is a rectangular stela whose upper part is arbitrarily divided into discrete elements: its projection on canvas does restore this subdivision – in fact ‘non-outspreadable’ - but merely the six sides of the piece, as if it were only a simple box closed in on itself. In addition, the drawing does not reflect the difference between the lower part of the work – a hollow volume formed of planks joined around a void- and the upper fragments, which are of solid wood. The apparent legibility of the trace is a come-on. The plane, in a falsely rational clarity, abounds with gaps and distortions. Another case, In the Street: the sculpture looks like a stack of pieces with very sharply cut out forms. Placed end to end and flat on the ground, these pieces make up a sort of large scalloped rosette, an exact enlargement of the smaller drawing that Elisabeth Ballet has given as an actuator to the piece. This rosette is reproduced by line in On the Road: thus here, the projection system leads to a short-circuit, a return to a sort of square one (not shown, only susceptible of being inferred) via the three dimensions and a change of scale. All these manoeuvres could finally form an apologue. The works are stopped but the effect of motion that they

expose to our view forces us to see them as if frozen in a continuous trajectory. In the effort that we make to reconstruct some moments of this trajectory, it appears that the rules which it obeys only have a degree of stability. Hence, without any doubt, our delectation: the figures pass by, but no lesson can be drawn from their voyage.

Jean-Pierre Criqui 1990  
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