

FONDATION

C A B

ALENTOUR

A PROJECT BY JOHN ARMLEDER

24 APRIL - 22 JUNE 2019

ALENTOUR ET CAQUELONS VOLANTS
AROUND AND FLYING FONDUE

Parker Williams and Cynthia Aspic meet with John M Armleder

Il San Pietro Hotel Terrace, Positano, March 2019

Parker Williams: The theory of succulents and the many anthropomorphic basins around us seem to me perfect for discussing your new project at CAB Brussels. It's been several years since we found ourselves around a table with cafes and *postri* and I can not begin to imagine how many projects I missed since our last conversation...

John M Armleder: Yes, let's talk about CAB, a former warehouse from the 1930s converted into a foundation for contemporary art. Hubert Bonnet initiated it to present minimal and conceptual art, with a venue in art deco style that contrasts nicely with the rugged extravagance and "sixties" atmosphere of our current location. As you know, I'm afraid my projects of the last years can not really be placed under the motto "the more it changes, the more it's the same thing".

Cynthia Aspic: I received a number of questions to prepare for this meeting that the CAB would like us to address. Knowing your appetite for digressions and generalised disorder, I would like us to answer them. What does this get-together of Mimmo Battista, Philippe Decrauzat, Sylvie Fleury, Christian Floquet, Poul Gernes, Fabrice Gygi, Stephane Kropf, Elaine Lustig Cohen, Olivier Mosset, Mai-Thu Perret, Ralph Rumney, Blair Thurman and John Tremblay, mean to you?

JMA: How can I begin to explain how the title « Alentour » (« Around ») came to me while creating the motive of a flying fondue pot for the exhibition's invitation? Was it an inexpressible link between the cosmic dimension of this container (doubled in perspective and then mirrored) and the gooey and improbable nature of its usual content? Or rather the huysmansian resonance of this adverbial phrase which, without a verb, seems to hint at those who sometimes surround me? Or, in trying to articulate myself as you are asking me to, this circle could be represented by the empty space of the utensil, in a conceptual understanding that something only exists by naming what surrounds it - its context, somehow. Or maybe even, this strange cheese viscosity that we call fondue is perhaps less a substance but more a process and a geometry, before it solidifies and transforms into the « religieuse », such is the traditional name in the French speaking part of Switzerland of the crusty residue which obviously stands as the culmination of this recipe. This is often the case with leftovers: they provoke pleasures that the dish itself can not provide. Where was I?

PW: If, in your practice, it is always the crust that matters, as well as leftovers and moving matter, I am surprised that you use this metaphor for artists whose work develop with a particular attention with rigorous geometry, abstract forms and clear-cut concepts. Do you think that Stéphane Kropf or John Tremblay, without even mentioning Mimmo Battista or Olivier Mosset, can adhere to this definition of painting as amalgam, almost like a porridge?

JMA: Know, my dear Parker, that this time you're right: this pudding, as you know, holds an eye in its center, whose outlook doesn't go without evoking the targets of John Tremblay, the circles of Olivier Mosset or the circuits of Blair Thurman, which are often hollow in their center. And, if we're discussing the visual feeling, how can we forget John Tremblay's description of Olivier's circles as "the optical art whose vibration would unfold over years"? We find ourselves, as you will understand, in the domain of the master Battista or the virtuoso Decrauzat - and not far from the material so much sought after by Kropf: iridescent double cream.

CA: It seems to me that this analysis, however attractive it may seem to some of your commentators, does not apply to all the artists in the exhibition: what can we say about the abstract vocabulary used by Poul Gernes, Mai-Thu Perret, Christian Floquet or Elaine Lustig Cohen? And how do you relate their practice to that of Sylvie Fleury, Ralph Rumney or Fabrice Gygi? In short, how do you go from geometric abstraction to the pictorial categories you have just mentioned? And how do you consider minimalism in all of this?

JMA: If analogies that do not deter a volcanologist study can be taken for categories, I remind you what brought me to know and appreciate Larry Poons' were his dot paintings, were works that by some people at the time were described as « hard edge » abstraction - even though the artist himself was about to launch into making « flows », « floods » and other wonderful « puddles ». This also resonates with Greenberg's theory, whose importance in the construction of a Doxa on post-war abstraction I don't need to emphasize. Paradoxically, by valuing acrylic, the "stains" of Louis Morris and the splashes of Jules Olitski were justified. And if Picabia has managed to go from mechanically produced paintings to polka dots and from transparent surfaces to using blistered oils, I don't see why an exhibition would not bring together paintings whose motifs are made using masking tape alongside « hand-made » abstractions, calligraphic watercolours alongside geometric ceramics that have a sluggish outline, "shaped canvasses" evoking a make-up case alongside optical illusion paintings, forms that are illuminated with gold alongside painted targets or even « Furniture Sculptures ». If all this does not give you the idea of boiled eggs cut in the middle and covered with a delicious « Grüne Sausse » for which Frankfurt holds the secret, that means that either my imagination is more open than yours or that my appetite is bigger.

PW: Here you are again in the confusion that befits you: mixing categories, piling up styles, throwing pell-mell references and blithely confusing roles. I am not surprised. But others may wonder about the status that this endeavor gives you: at the same time artist and instigator, participant and inviting party, producer of forms as well as conductor.

JMA: I wasn't that much more innocent in 1984, when I was organising « Abstract Painting » in Geneva: mainly devoted to international geometric abstraction (R. Mangold, Sol Lewitt, G. Rockenschaub, R. Ryman, G. Merz, L. Fontana, A. Held, etc.), and including, besides Olivier and myself, some Helvetians as well (H. Federle, V. Loewensberg). And even though I was already used to this type of artistic combination, mainly because of the activities at gallery Ecart, this exhibition resonated widely - maybe because it adhered to the « zeitgeist » of an era that wanted to bring out « neo-geometries » and other « commodity sculptures ». Let's not forget though that in the current context, this will not really be the case, since the current atmosphere isn't so inclined to critical labelling or reliant on conceptual nominalism. Nevertheless, I like the artists and the works brought together by this project in all their diversity, difference and singularity.

CA: Certainly, but many of the artists in the exhibition have a strong connection with Switzerland. Could you tell us more about this?

JMA: If it's all right by you, dear Cynthia, the question I do not want to spoil with an answer, is the one you just asked me.

Parker Williams is a writer who studied with Buckminster Fuller and Alan Watts. He founded the garage punk group "Snowpeas in Tutus," which knew a resounding success in 1978 in Minneapolis. Interested by the foam sculptures of the 60s and 70s as well as Plexiglas, he published the key work *Foam, Rubber, and Dunlopino in Art Today* and is today a sought-after specialist for the restoration of these materials. He lives in Taos and Seattle.

Cynthia Aspic is an art historian based between Naples and Château-d'Oex.

Practical Details

Fondation CAB
32-34 Rue Borrens
1050 Brussels
Belgium
info@fondationcab.be
+32 2 644 34 32

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Press contact
REIBER PR
Zénaïde d'Albufera
T. +32 2 850 23 23
E. zenaide@reiberpr.com