

ENCOUNTER

By Ann Hindry

When I visited Maibritt Ulvedal Bjelke for the first time in her studio she told me an anecdote about the 1996 Paris ENSBA exhibition of the *'Diplômés avec félicitations du jury'* in which she was included: an amateur and collector seduced by her work had insisted to meet her but had then quickly cancelled when he discovered that Maibritt was a woman! Shocking admittedly, yet classic. What is more interesting and disturbing for me is that after leaving her and still under the impression of her artworks, I realised that my intimate reaction to the story had been, despite the offended words I pronounced at the time, just as outdated: "Not surprising, its too vigorous, too independent", I had spontaneously thought... as if the two qualities, absolutely constituent of Maibritt's work, were still in my mind fundamentally masculine! Vigorous, Maibritt's painting is more and more so and independent, that goes without saying, as to knowing whether it's feminine or masculine, the question is without relevance of course.

Trained in the great western tradition of abstract art, from the great Albers's work on colour interaction to the experimentation of the physical reality of the painting by the group Supports-Surfaces, Maibritt has bathed in pictorial phenomenology. However, over the past two decades, she has traced a quite singular path that her recent works remarkably underline.

Since the beginning, she has explored both the essential nature of her practise and the quality of otherness she recognizes in the painting she creates. There is a confrontation face to face, body to body, in a shared time and space. In recent series, a new alternating dynamic has affirmed itself in four acts so to speak: 1) the artist's decision-making 2) the time belonging to the painting, 3) the artist's decision-making, 4) the time and action of the painting. On the upper edge of the paper surface tamed through *marouflage*, the artist deposits the pigment that drips at its own rhythm on the smoothed surface all the way down to the floor beyond the lower edge of the painting, or rather of the fragment of painting. The artist's arbitrariness is evidently applied in the first phase through the choice of colours and their tight placing, through the rhythm of 'voids' left between the curtains of lines and through the decision to operate by fragments, but it won't be applied again until later, in the third phase, through the deliberately programmatic constitution of the different fragments into a single work. Along with the arithmetic placing of their varying formats into square or orthogonal multi-panelled single works, the discreet reversal of a fragment sometimes occurs so that a series of dripped lines will feature upside down, or in diagonal. Meanwhile the paint will have covered the distance of the surface according to its fluidity, the smoothness of the surface, the room temperature... this is the time belonging to the painting. The caesura marking the juncture points of these puzzle paintings inspired by Chinese *Tangram*, are more or less visible whether they be vertical (in the direction of the drippings) horizontal or diagonal. Then, phase 4 intervenes: the eye of the spectator is caught by what he senses visible beyond what he can see. It's through the insistence of his gaze at recomposing the painting's itinerary that the latter regains its autonomy as the bright and acid colour lines begin to vibrate. Lines of caesura and threads of pigment visually merge or oppose each other. The temporal and spatial face to face *relation* that the artist maintains with each work is experimented in turn by the spectator. A painting to live in real time, renewed at each encounter.

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