

When *horror vacui* becomes *amor vacui*

[Imaging the Invisible, exhibition by Robbin Deyo at Axenéo7 artist run centre, from March 24 to May 2, 2010]

“All the shifts in our sensibility, as delightful they may be, are always interruptions of a state which consists of something I do not know, but which is this sensibility’s most intimate life.”

Fernando Pessoa, The Book of Disquiet

Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote “perception is always in the mode of the “impersonal One”ⁱ. This statement seems more than relevant when considering Robbin Deyo’s work presented at Axenéo 7. The pretext here seized by the artist is to manifest these silent “cracklings” that are the invisible magnetic waves of all sorts surrounding and enclosing us as we go about our everyday life. It is a “hygienic” undertaking, according to the artist, that almost aims at exorcizing these contemporary demons that new technologies are. A personal reason too, tied to a difficult, fragile state of health.

Thus, this rather dull – and indeed traditional – space that the white cube is, has just been redesigned and, subsequently, reinvested by color. There are stimuli enabling us to go beyond the expected experience and offering us something completely different from what we had prepared for. This form of artistic presentation – the exhibition- should perhaps be renamed and a more representative expression found to describe the experience offered. It is indeed imperative to express the semantic discontent exuding from the word, which, in this case, almost becomes frivolous. Alternatively, Deyo’s proposition could as well be termed an expansion, a dilatation, a conquest, an occupation of space, and an architectural reconsideration. An exhibition then, and more.

There is a beautiful, poetic and nowadays quite uncommon, feminine quality to Robbin Deyo’s work. The luminosity of the stripes of colors used, cyclamen, yellow, fluorescent green, intense orange, blue, produces a quasi-mystical heightening, similar to the light filtered through gothic cathedrals’ stained-glass. The use of powerful color generates a significant amount of energy. The space’s physiognomy is thus modified by a kind of thermal delirium, saturated colors seemingly distorting the ambient temperature in a warm and positive way.

The artist reconsiders the space in a chromo-architectural way through painting,

repetition, and gleaming intensity, full coverage of the surface, all-over. She does interior design with nothing but color. Deyo creates chromo-spaces with “highs” and “lows” where the axes are disrupted by the lack of reference, where we lose all assignable directions. It is an intellectualized space that becomes meaningful through our efforts to straighten its perspective and mentally rectify it, immanent prerogatives deriving from our natural tendency for a particular empiricism. Floating appearances, empty yet “overcrowded” contents, evanescent anchorage points, untouchable “tactile” spatiality, consistency of the fleeting immediacy, those are only some of the ways to describe the intervention that won’t be fully understood without being seen. In fact, the place (or the non-place?) becomes the site of an encounter between antinomical and paradoxical sensations, just like the title of the artist’s solo show suggests, *Imaging the invisible*. We seem to see a certain irony, precisely resulting from this rather trivial use of paint that, slicing and cutting up the space, creates a far more intense experience than, let’s say, a more traditional, “painting-on-the-wall”.

In this manner, the white cube will cross over the border of the commonplace, semantic and topographic, to reposition itself into a space for contemplation, wandering, sensorial experience. Yet, it is also an experience of time: not only validated by the time of the wandering in the space, but also by the fact that we carry a part of our own into the piece as we enter it. We bring our life experiences along as we come in contact with the presentness of this interventionⁱⁱ.

Those who visited the 2009 Venice Biennale probably would have noted the project that was awarded the Golden Lion, German artist Tobias Rehberger’s “Was du liebst, bringt dich auch zum Weinen” (Whatever you love, will bring you to wines). He had converted a cafeteria into an installation, using the colors black and white. Through this shift in meaning, social communication becomes an artistic practice.

Like Rehberger, Robbin Deyo also deals with shifts in meaning, but what is found here is closer to an unspeakable poetizing of the sensorial experience through the modification of the given space. A sensual delight of visual exhalations that could only make the greatest alexandrine writers envious.

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ⁱ Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *La phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 287.

ⁱⁱ The person who, in sensory exploration, gives a past to the present and directs it towards a future, is not myself as an autonomous subject, but myself in so far as I have a body and am able to “look”. Rather than being a genuine story, perception ratifies us and renews us into a “pre-history”.” Id., p. 287.