

Trois traces d'Oscar

Painter Jacques Benoit's reveries around Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer's work



“ «Three Traces Oscar» is the title of an exhibition of paintings currently on display at Niemeyer Space. That is the vast lobby of the French Communist Party's headquarters, in Colonel Fabien Square, in Paris. This building is truly amazing, as are the Bobigny Trade Union Center and the daily L'Humanité's headquarters in Saint-Denis – these being part of these «three traces», considered as being the most important works left by Brazilian architect in Ile de France. Three projects designed in part during the exile imposed by the military dictatorship in Brazil, between 1965 and 1972, and that the architect of Brasilia himself considers to be important steps in his career -Brasilia being, as a matter of fact, precisely where it all began for

Jacques Benoit. He was only twelve years in the late sixties, when at random out of a magazine, his gaze fell on a photo showing the Three Powers Plaza in Brasilia. «It was simply splendid, he writes, ...Hieratically empty, and yet animated by a sort of secret life, an indefinable pulse, that expressed the mind of the creator of this site”.

The author of this place, he did meet much later, in 2004, in Rio, down his Copacabana studio. A three-hour meeting, that he filmed, for a film project based on the genesis of Brasilia. This project has not yet been released because of lack of means. Meanwhile, Jacques Benoit, a graphic designer and a painter, worked on Brasilia and exhibited his work. It was during a 2005

exhibition in Paris, during the Year of Brazil in France, that he met with the PCF Headquarters' administration and that was born the idea to expose in the very heart of the Parisian building some new paintings devoted exclusively to Niemeyer's major achievements in Ile de France.

In just one year, Jacques Benoit created 27 large canvases. They dress in bright colors the deep concrete curves of the vast hall thzt the building erected by Niemeyer shelters. This «free and sensual” curve, as the architect himself used to say. The curve of the mountains of his country, the waves of the sea or –more specifically- «the body of the favorite woman.» A leitmotif in the heart of his architectural work, that Jacques Benoit echoes in his paintings.

When Jacques Benoit echoes this work, he focuses specifically on women as his work evokes stone and glass. But the painter does have his own muses. Nothing prevents him from thinking – from dreaming-, that those share something in common with the genius of the architect, and nothing prevents him to convene them in his paintings. Connoisseurs wandering through certain canvases can therefore identify allegorical figures of the «singer-musicians» Joni Mitchell and Kate Bush. Stanley Kubrick, the masterful director of “2001: A Space Odyssey”, plays also his own role facing Niemeyer in the polyptych “A Painter's Dream”. This series of four paintings confronts the two geniuses, at different stages of their lives.

Volumes, boldness, materials, light. The works of Jacques Benoit reflect the reality of Niemeyer's architecture. The painter does not forget the commitment of the architect though, updating it in a painting entitled “Lumières (Enlightenments)”, where we can find Voltaire, the President of French Association «Neither Whores nor Obedients» and an activist belonging to the Association Prochoix all gathered in the vast bright space of the meeting room of daily L'Humanité. This year, in December 2007, Oscar Niemeyer will be a hundred years old!

DANIELLE BIRCK *

* Journalist at RFI

Exhibition «Three Traces of Oscar.» Until March 3rd, at the headquarters of the PCF, 2 Place du Colonel Fabien, 75019 Paris