ALMINE RECH

John M Armleder
ENCORE TROP

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A few monotypes, two screen prints and a multiple

Before attempting to unravel the meaning, or meanings, behind the title of this exhibition, *ENCORE TROP*, we can consider a couple of quotes by John Armleder from the recent catalogue of a group exhibition he curated, *It Never Ends, John M. Armleder & Guests* (Kanal – Centre Pompidou, Bruxelles, September 2020). The title of this solo and group exhibition seems to imply a perception of time and space that distances itself from the definitive. Armleder feeds on the propositions, the circumstances as well as the context to make his choices : « I always work following the logic of the space and the people who invite me [...] »[1]. Here, we find a very seventies philosophy, horizontal, a philosophy of delegation, where the very existence of the work of art is shared by all, in a limitless and open-ended interaction which considers the means of production, the exhibition spaces, and finally the viewer as entirely part of the creative process. In the same catalog one can find the sentence chosen as the exhibition title at the Museion of Bolzano in 2018 : « Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. » (« The more it changes, the more it remains the same. »)[2]

This observation echoes perfectly the circumstances of the exhibition at the CEC, *ENCORE TROP*, which follows our first collaboration in 1992, more than 30 years ago, when we produced a series of 21 engravings (etchings and monotypes), all unique, which offered a range of different types of print : monochrome surfaces resulting from the inking of an industrially sanded plate, drippings of acid that, when inked, would transform into colorful printed drips, or simply trinkets and glitters directly thrown onto the plate, which would then be crushed and melded with the paper under the pressure of the press roll. Comment from the time: « Etching gives John Armleder the freedom to use the same « motifs » over and over again, with little to no work. In contrast to the traditional practice of using a plate to reproduce the same etching in several copies, John Armleder starts from four matrices treated differently in order to produce a set of dissimilar prints. Thus, he can choose various combinations – superimpositions, inversions, color inking. Without any pre-established system, the decisions depend on the circumstances, the flaws and the successes of each print run. John Armleder rediscovers this freedom of choice which allows him to oscillate between etching and pictorial effects, between free abstraction and geometry, between necessary and relative, between style and non-style, between self-criticism and distancing. »[3]

Indeed, everything changes and nothing changes. The monotypes exhibited today at the CEC recall the ones produced and exhibited in 1992 : monotypes, unique pieces, available in series, where everything is kept as is. In the series currently exhibited, *Shady place for sunny people* (2024), three large sheets display drips, and four others, almost fully white, are in reality protective sheets, marked with colored residual imprints from the pressure of a weighed system, which allowed the transfer of masses of ink on the first ones, and left the traces of their overflows on the second ones. These simple stains also echo the « splashes », recurring stylized motifs in Armleder's work, here screenprinted, gold or silver, on two sets of paper sheets, pink or yellow, mounted on cardboard, recovered from an edition produced in 1979, a leporello, *Lézards Sauvages IIa/ « égouttés »*. Each leaflet used to display a printed reproduction of a comb, whole or broken, found on the streets of Geneva. This harvest offered Armleder the casualness of a stroll and the recovery of a pre-existing object : a performance which lasted the time of his journeys, and a ready-made form, an abstract, random and unselective grid, which made the series possible.

This new edition keeps the same title while continuing the numbering begun in 1979, *Lézards Sauvages III* and *IV*, (1979) 2024. The recovery of old material from more than 40 years ago, 1979/2024, suggests a crushing of time, between nostalgia and newness. A continuous creation cycle between recovery and self-citation, which eludes the linearity and finality of the retrospective, blurring the lines of dating, archiving and conservation, preferring « the semicolon, the comma to the full stop. »[4]

Concerning the comb metaphor, beyond Duchamp's ready-made or Armleder's iconic braid, worn unchanged and at all times, the notion of gap deserves consideration, the gap between the teeth of the comb, between the spread hair, regrouped, shaped, as a philosophy of the gap and of the side step, important for the artist collective Ecart, founded in the 1970s by Armleder and two friends, Claude Rychner and Patrick Lucchini. One can also think of the comb as a simplified brush, both literally « brushing », brushing but not really, to paint as to brush, a distanced, ironical gesture, far from expression and pathos, a sort of mechanised painting, which prefers the arbitrariness of dripping and the mechanics of transfer. No need for further research on artistic and linguistic metaphors, as Armleder himself prefers to keep a distance from text and analysis : « In my work, I am in favor of getting rid of the text and its constraints on comprehension. »[5]

For Armleder, the harvest of the combs, this action, and the leporello edition of 1979 are part of an equivalent whole, as the unused recovered sheets of this leporello will serve as the background of our two screen prints, *Lézards Sauvages III* and *IV*, (1979) 2024. Added to these three steps, the edition of a multiple, an engraved comb, once again a comb, *ENCORE TROP*, a sort of return to the real object, as for him « There is no gap between art and other objects». He then follows : « Art is not singular, and is absolutely not useful. Art is only inevitable. »[6]

Véronique Bacchetta, March 2023 (trad. Flavia Vuagniaux)

1 "Quatre entretiens avec John Armleder", "It Never Ends", *It Never Ends, John M Armleder & Guests*, éd. Yann Chateigné Tytelman, KANAL – Centre Pompidou et Lenz, Bruxelles, 2024, p. 192.
2 *Ibid*., p. 193.
3 Véronique Bacchetta, extract from the press release for John Armleder's exhibition at the CGGC/CEC from 11 June to 18 July 1992.
4 "Point, virgule, point-virgule", *It Never Ends, John M Armleder & Guests*, éd. Yann Chateigné Tytelman, KANAL – Centre Pompidou et Lenz, Bruxelles, 2024, p. 201.
5 op.cit. p. 192.
6 Extract from a quotation by John Armleder at the beginning of the postface, Yves Goldstein, "It Never Ends (Postface)", *It Never Ends, John M Armleder & Guests*, éd. Yann Chateigné Tytelman, KANAL – Centre Pompidou et Lenz, Bruxelles, 2024, p. 190.