ALMINE RECH

Alexandre Lenoir
Par la force des choses

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Born in 1992, Alexandre Lenoir mainly paints landscapes, crossed by often ghostlike figures indifferent to the beholder. His paintings are based on photographs he selects as souvenirs of happy moments, yet they are dominated by an imperious nature to which he deliberately allows a degree of arbitrariness. Rather than attempting to depict nature realistically, he practices a form of alchemy that gives rise to works appearing to have emerged spontaneously, almost without the artist's intervention. A surprising melancholy emanates from these familiar scenes bathed in brilliant light. On the occasion of the 16th Contemporary Counterpoint at the Musée de l'Orangerie, Alexandre Lenoir unveils four previously unseen paintings.

Following instructions he sets for himself or for non-painter assistants, Lenoir works on images transformed by time – both the time elapsed between the photograph and the painting, and the time required for the painting's slow creation. He begins by applying countless layers of paint, the lightest to the darkest tones, onto a multitude of small pieces of adhesive tape that alternately mask and reveal the canvas.This process reconstructs the projected image on which the painting is based, while deliberately avoiding any "romantic" effects.

"It all started with a canvas titled *Les Cévennes*", he remembers, "where I had to find a way of applying the fewest possible brushstrokes to depict the surface of the water and its reflections. So adhesive tape made it entrance as a way of preparing the ground for my washes of paint, which I applied to the canvas sideways, like a printer. In the end, when I removed the tape, I saw an image as if I'd dreamed it, whose architecture and frames had already existed at the start, but inside which the paint had taken its rightful place. I went on to develop a very close relationship with this translational method that led me to mask, cover and then discover. In short, it's a form of revelation that can evoke a photograph's revelation. It lets me leave a measure of freedom to the beholders who look at the canvas in the end, as I don't want to be the only one to impose the image on them".

In this respect, the painter's ambition matches Monet's, to work on perception, the invisible: "I have gone back to things that can't possibly be done", Monet wrote to Gustave Geffroy on June 22, 1890, "water with weeds waving at the bottom [...] it is a wonderful sight, but it drives me mad to want to do it. But that is the kind of thing I am always tackling!" (Letter quoted in *Gustave Geffroy, Monet, sa Vie, son Oeuvre* [1924], Paris, Macula, 1980, p.30).

Alexandre Lenoir plays with the tensions between an assertive realism and creative processes that are as elaborate as they are experimental. He works on "the action of seeing" in relation to the act that is going to create the image, the act of the water, that of the tree, organizing a kind of ecosystem comparable to the one souhgt by Claude Monet when he created his Grand Decorations: "The temptation came to me to employ this theme of water lilies in the decoration of a drawing room: transported along the walls, enveloping all the panels with its unity, it would have procured the illusion of a whole without end, of a wave without horizon and without shore." (Claude Monet quoted by Roger Marx, "Les Nymphéas de M. Claude Monet", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, June 1909).

“When I rediscovered the Nymphéas,” explains Lenoir, “I was struck by the way the water moved in rhythm with the changing light of the exhibition galleries. Indeed, the materiality of the canvases was such that the light would sometimes cling to them and then immediately slip away, creating in my eye the constant movement of water. Painting as a living entity interests me greatly. Through repeated gestures and their inherent uncertainties, the life of the studio always produces an image that surprises me, yet fully embodies the water of the canvases I will present for the exhibition.”

He speculates on what it means to be a painter and such questioning is most certainly perceptible in his paintings, which are highly complex despite their seeming simplicity. He readily recalls the artist Niele Toroni’s phrase “Working on what the paint works on its own”, which he has set himself as a rule to follow and to break.