ALMINE RECH

Johan Creten
FIAC On Site - Petit Palais

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LE BANC DES AMOUREUX Conceived between 1994 and 2011, Le Banc des amoureux consists of two horizontal elements that are typologically simple - a parallelepipedal seat and back renewing the prosaic motif of the board - embedded in two vertical forms that are explicitly sexual. Tradition flanked by audacity; orthodoxy framed by extravagance. This intrepid, almost antithetical collusion characterizes the creation of Johan Creten who, for many years, has been reflecting on the polysemy of fundamental, primary forms.
The bench is a key protagonist of urban furniture. lt populates cities and draws perspectives - parks and avenues - in the same capacity as the fountain, the column and the lamp post, with this exception that it can, on an altogether different scale, inhabit memories and establish narratives - a first caress, a first blush, words of tenderness, violent disputes, discreet break-ups, stolen kisses, exhibited kisses, adolescent languor, the tiredness of age. Johan Creten knows it, proves it: the bench is the civilized territory of intimacy.

The bench is part of a long tradition that intends to accommodate, and sometimes to regulate, intimacy, as if one ought to turn the exterior into the liberated territory of interiority. Public gardens, in the French or English style, broad boulevards imagined for leisurely strolls and lascivious encounters, places conceived like sites of sensual delight and of seeing. This bench was made to see and to be seen. This is what Johan Creten seems to assert, who for several years has been turning phallic motifs into "observation points", like reinvestments of the mooring bollard. On the bench, we can observe the spectacle of the world, and we can show ourselves ...
Le Banc des amoureux is a large sculpture in the round. Better yet, it is an assemblage, in the sense demonstrated by Auguste Rodin, of various oeuvres which, potentially, can or could gain in autonomy. Stemming from a drawing made in Puy-en-Velay in 1994, the two phallic elements, endowed here with a structural utility, will soon be able to end up upside down within an oeuvre whose title proves that it is an incandescent response to Constantin Brancusi (Le Baiser, 2013). Between archaism and triviality, these fungiform pillars evoke two sexual attributes, but also, by virtue of a feigned naivety, the garden gnomes that move themselves deliciously on the lawns of residential properties.
These immemorial fetishes, which most certainly remember the menhirs of Corsica and the stones erected in the Great Rift Valley, couId not be merely phallic: the arborescences that cover them, inspired by the sculptor's famous Odore di Femmina, unquestionably curb this virility towards the other sex, which has become inseparable, unseparated. The feminine baroque here crowns the masculine primitive, so that this floral form (which evokes the shrub that the funerary Genius of the Monument à Puvis de Chavannes made by Rodin in 1899-1903) could almost pass for the exhalation - more ether than fluid - of the totemic penis, which has become Vénus de Lespugue. As a result, and if you look closely, these vertical pillars are ambivalent, perhaps even androgynous erections, which consecrate the metonymy of gallantry and conversation, but also of sexuality.

Made all of bronze, even though it imitates the texture of wood - boards, branches - or uses minerai forms - steles, menhirs this bench is a three-dimensional trompe l'oeil, liable to pass for what it is not. Clandestine, it welcomes clandestine loves. Ambiguous, it offers hospitality to surreptitious desires. lt coils itself up around them. Capable, in the heart of the city, of liberating morals and bodies, of frustrating the conformism of thought and the conformity of the gaze, Le Banc des amoureux is a seditious, eminently political work, a bronze torpedo launched at the established order, with its plenipotentiary orthodoxy.

Colin Lemoine