

La société des spectacles

Feb 13 — Apr 20, 2024 | Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris, France

What might be the common denominator between the practices of Farah Atassi and Ulla von Brandenburg, two artists who at first glance have nothing in common?

Perhaps an exaltation, a celebration of the spectacle of forms that a half-drawn curtain presents to us.

In Atassi's paintings, the curtain is open and yet the dancers are motionless. Time stands still. The curtain does not open onto the show of a choreography but onto a show of forms. A form among forms, the character seems to be no more than one element of an authentic still life. What better than a grid as a backdrop for celebrating form? While the modernist fable has made it the symbol of an anti-narrative choice and of formal purism that rejects meaning and depth, in Farah Atassi's paintings the grid becomes the podium of lauded formalism. A "theatricality" reinforced by the gaze of these languid dancers, including the presence of the viewer.

This same viewer is invited to enter Ulla von Brandenburg's environments and traverse the colours and monumental textile paintings that the artist majestically deploys within the space. As in Atassi's paintings, Von Brandenburg mobilises a multiplicity of art forms (dance, music, theatre, and so on) within her vocabulary. This reflects a body of work that does not define itself in terms of pure textile specificity but through a constructive activation of other chapters in the history of the arts. Both artists, Atassi in the pictorial space and Von Brandenburg in the exhibition space, share the same project of producing abstract forms in the manner of a universal language applying to all artistic forms and all fields of society, seeking to blur the boundaries separating art from life, in line with historical avant-gardes.

In this way, through the recent film *La fenêtre s'ouvre comme une orange* (2022) [The Window Opens Like an Orange], Von Brandenburg revives the ghost of female figures of modernity, particularly Sonia Delaunay and her dresses created simultaneously in 1913, while Atassi's paintings set in motion dancers, musicians, and other masked figures on stage and behind the scenes, recalling Oskar Schlemmer's historic ballets and Xanti Schawinsky's stagings.

La société des spectacles examines the use of the stage, spectacle, and artifice, and all the ambiguities that they give rise to within very different art practices, while both fall within a modernist legacy.

On the other hand, both artists' work is infused with a profound analysis of space, celebrated in the exhibition. In a maze-like pathway, formed by panels of colourful fabric, viewers will have a singular experience in the exhibition space: they will become immersed in colour and then discover Atassi's canvases, through an opening in a curtain. These huge textile objects form a camouflage, concealing Atassi's female models in languid poses, who themselves inhabit pictorial spaces playing on both registers of intimacy and the spectacular. Farah Atassi's paintings emerge as the set for Ulla von Brandenburg's installations and Von Brandenburg's environments as the set for Atassi's canvases.

— Marjolaine Lévy