

GEORGES ROUSSE

27 th June - 24th september 1996

GEORGES ROUSSE AND THE GAZE OF THE INNOCENTS

The work of Georges Rousse is today situated at the centre of a remarkable closure, a closure that has been produced in the image of the rules promulgated by the mysticism of certain founding fathers. In effect, his work is a permanent summons, a gentle invitation to penetrate into places that we could not have visited without the pretext of the artist's desire to reinhabit dismantled spaces, deconstructed spaces, devastated by the aggression of time or the indifference of memory.

It is essential to appreciate the benevolence of the gaze in Georges Rousse's images. Neither theft, nor appropriation, nor flight, his process is frontal, and when he considers the place he has chosen he begins an immaterial construction. Then the elements that are in play inaugurate a poetics: the places where the artist halts are architectonic places, places which in fact once had a function, a use, places traced out by the collective will, and which have often had no other dignity than the everydayness of use. The artist's penetration is in the first instance physical, sensible. He often clears the way for absences, displaces the silence and on the altered walls signals the points of anchorage that will make it possible to draw tight the lines of music that will sustain the appearance of the new harmony. It is the instant of mutual fascination: the dying place is there laid out before the work that is to be born, and between them the arbiter of the last play, the artist, whose intervention does not resort to the habitual practices of painting or photography. The painter appropriates, the artist steals, but neither of these tactics manages to convince Georges Rousse.

The artist's originality is, in this respect, disarming. And if in the first instance his work plays with our surprise, it is because it is introduced by the logic and the complexity of a rite. Georges Rousse does not shroud his work in secrecy; on the contrary, he freely comments on his production, sure as he is of the underlying intention. Certainly, the taking of the image is photographic; certainly, his gaze has in principle no more than one eye, that of the lens which constructs everything; certainly, his pictorial intervention is frequently based on accessory elements which nourish the trompe-l'oeil effects; certainly, the trompe-l'oeil perspectives are often obscure and reveal themselves through the intervention of mirrors on which the lies and truths of the image play. But what do we get from this series of certainties? Georges Rousse's rites have their reasons; their object lies in the deepest of these.

The six images proffered by the artist after visiting the old van Gogh hospital in Arles organize our gaze by trompe-l'oeil, in pairs. They all speak of closure, but each one organizes in its own fashion the vanishing point of the gaze, the pursuit of the limitless, of transparency. Two of these images introduce planes within the constraint of already closed spaces; supplementary concealments that dispose in the centre of the image a quality of light and of white through which the imaginary can flourish. The next two, remarkable for the masses of which they dispose – black or blue – materialize at the same time light in volume and reconstruction, each one falsifies or shows the exterior, the melancholy of the black light and the captured sky. Finally, the last two photographs, presented panoramically, seek and find the horizons that so many men have brought to these places.

Georges Rousse's poetics is expressed in this way: if he accepts the positioning of the mechanical gaze of his lens in an inspired place, it is in the first place to live alone in the midst of the shadows, to capture the ectoplasmic breaths that still whisper amongst the

constraint of bodies; to express the force of an imaginary before the monumental; it is finally to trace the lines of perspective to their vanishing point and open up cracks in the order of the closure.

If with Georges Rousse the eye is still in the tomb, it is so that the truth of the innocents may come to light.

Michel Enrici

This text was published in the catalogue *Georges Rousse, suivi d'un extrait des Chants de Maldoror de Lautréamont*, Actes Sud, Arles, 1986.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ANAMORPHOSES

To paint on the walls, to touch the walls, to be at the foot of the wall, to find this relationship of the self with the space.

Georges Rousse

Georges Rousse (Paris, 1947) produced the series «Arles» in 1986, after visiting the town's old van Gogh psychiatric hospital and installing himself there for a period of time in order to work in a space that had lost its original function. Since the early eighties, when he first began to be interested in painting, and particularly in the new figuration emerging in France, one of the key aspects of his work has been the location of abandoned spaces, almost ruined architectures, that would enable him to delimit his territory by means of the application of colour. Georges Rousse is interested in ruins and in what they allow us to perceive with regard to the culture and the society that produced them, together with the silence that reigns in these abandoned spaces.

Shortly before the «Arles» series, Georges Rousse had renounced figuration and had commenced a new phase in which the relationships between painting, sculpture and architecture conferred uniqueness on his work. The outcome was not only an aesthetic discovery, but a whole engagement with the importance of the various aspects of the process he directs towards exploring the relationship between the self and the surrounding space. In abandoning the narrative aspect implicit in figuration, a geometric abstraction imposed itself on his work, constructed on the optical phenomenon of anamorphosis, and with the photographic viewpoint as the site definitively constructing the photographic image. Thus the function of photography would be to establish a distance between the spectator and these abandoned spaces, in order to continue to preserve their «silences». In fact, in each new located space Georges Rousse makes his own a new studio in which he struggles «to empty, to clean and to evacuate a whole past», and adopts a role that we might also describe as that of the archaeologist. Studios which are discovered and displaced in his travels and can only be shared thanks to the photographic image.

This affinity with the archaeologist's task is indicative of the artist's attitude towards his work: a slow way of operating and a traditional application of colour, that reveals the qualities of the painting and exploits natural light in order to endow these spaces with a sacred character. As he himself says, «I am an ant who constructs all day something that nobody understands».

The works produced between 1984 and 1986 consolidated the bases of what his subse-

quent work was to be, a work which seeks the visual fragmentation of the space and its photographic reconstruction from the parameters of a rigid geometrism. Perhaps this is the reason why in the catalogue for the «Arles» series, published in 1986, Georges Rousse included an extract from Lautréamont's *Chants de Maldoror*, a eulogy to mathematics: «O mathématiques sévères, je ne vous ai pas oubliées, depuis que vos savants leçons, plus duces que le miel, filtrèrent dans mon coeur, comme une onde rafraîchissante. J'aspirais instinctivement, dès le berceau, à boire à votre source, plus ancienne que le soleil

Glòria Picazo

BIOGRAPHY

Georges Rousse was born in Paris in 1947, where he lives and works.

At the start of his career he devoted himself to photography, taking portraits of his painter friends, but he subsequently abandoned this practice and made a place for himself in the art world.

He made contact with the artists of the Figuration Libre movement, including Robert Combas, Hervé Di Rosa and Jean-Michel Alberola, committed to creative spontaneity.

His work soon found an individual character of its own, and he centred his attention on the intervention in the space, the light, the superimposition, transparency and colour, and on the way all of these elements intervene in the perception of the image. His work reveals the influence of Piet Mondrian, James Turrell, Barnett Newman and Kasimir Malevich, as he himself acknowledges.

An incessant traveller, his studio is constantly on the move to the different places he visits and in which he carries out his work. The works are therefore grouped in series of images whose title – «Fontévrard», «Arles», «Marseille» – simply corresponds to the place.

At the start of the eighties he began to intervene in derelict spaces, such as a building above a car park (1981) or an old hospital in La-Roche-sur-Yon (1983), and worked in New York, London and Berlin.

Following the series «Embrasures» (1987), produced in different parts of Italy, he began to introduce words or texts into his work. He worked in various cities in Japan, a country he visits often, and also took part in the Aperto at the Venice Biennale in 1988.

In 1990 he produced works in Cyprus and Jerusalem, in which the texts were replaced by a kind of unintelligible graffiti. These works were presented in the group exhibition «13 critics, 26 photographers» at the Centre d'Art Santa Mònica in Barcelona (1992).

In 1993 he had a one-man show at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION:

Sans titre, Bercy, 1984, cibachrome, 230x260 cm.
Frac, Collection Aquitaine, Bordeaux.

Sans titre, 1986, cibachrome, 299x121 cm.
Collection du Musée Cantini, MAC Galeries Contemporaines des Musées de Marseille, Marseille.

Arles, 1986, cibachrome, 135x332x3 cm.
Collection des Musées d'Arles.

Arles, 1986, cibachrome, 120x260 cm (díptic).
Collection Frac Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, Marseille.

Sans titre, Fontévrard, 1984, cibachrome, 206x268 cm.
Collection Frac Pays de la Loire, Nantes.

Arles, 1986, cibachrome, 190x240 cm.
Collection Frac Haute Normandie, Rouen.