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« The Subjective Cityscape »

For Plato, then Descartes, urban space was the mirror of the mind. But historical reality showed it in an unflattering light, like a palimpsest, a chaotic accumulation of temporal and spatial strata ; whereas the ideal city, like the enlightened human spirit, had to be developed in a rational and orderly way. The ideal city has never gone beyond the stage of utopia (the fiasco that was Brasilia is a famous illustration of this). On the other hand, the need to regulate through urban planning continued to exist. With the exponential growth of cities since the Second World War, there has been an ongoing conflict between this often anarchic growth and the projects of administrations, urban planners and architects who wish to control it. Indeed, contemporary urban planning tends towards an homogenization which constantly calls into question urban diversity. It creates sanitized, entertaining and dreamlike environments in city centres, while at the same time it exiles disturbing social realities to the periphery.

But, conversely, what about the imprint of urban space on the human spirit and how is this influence expressed in art? The urban experience and the notion of the « city » have, of course, an important place in contemporary art, starting with urban art. The artists participating in the exhibition « The Subjective Cityscape » treat this notion in very different and personal ways.

For the French artist **Anne-Flore Cabanis**, the city is as much a concept, an abstract way of organizing space, as an intimate experience, the internalization of this space. Anne-Flore creates virtual cities, in which tortuous paths, always drawn at right angles, accumulate and rub shoulders very closely but never intersect, as if the city were a labyrinth where one gets lost and where proximity does not go hand in hand with communication. These labyrinths, which do not seem to follow a particular logic, sometimes fit into human brains (the series of drawings "SUM"), or they mimic, like shadows, great classics of art (the diptychs on Rodin). To the spatial dimension of cities is added a time dimension, since the artist draws them within a very precise time frame, freehand. Moreover, space is an ambiguous notion for the artist : she paints, in bright colors, clusters of molecules, tiny elements of space ; but she paints them on very large canvases, the result reminding us of infrared aerial images of urban agglomerations (« Surge »).

In a completely different style, the American artists **Jennifer Gray & Phillip Johnson** (who form a duo) start with urban images projected on canvas, which they later modify using mixed techniques : drawing and painting, photography, engraving, digital art. These additions, at times reminiscent of urban art techniques, give the works of the Chicago duo an unreal and anxiety charged atmosphere. Thus, in "The Paper-Morning Commute", the interior of a dark-colored train acquires a strange transparency through which one can distinguish, like ghosts, traces of human presence ; the central corridor leads to a distant silhouette. In "Bounty Intersection", a crossroads seen from above through the schematic drawing of a tree becomes a place charged with tension, where writings on the ground seem to involve anonymous passers-by in their secret meanings.

The exhibition « The Subjective Cityscape » will be on view at the Galerie du Forez from March 7 to April 11, 2020.