

## THE SERIES IN THE WORK OF FRANCIS PELLERIN

A narrow street; red predominates. Distinguishable by the green line delineating the forms, it is crushed by a sun we know not where: outside the walls, off the canvas. From gable to façade, from ground to wall, the light vibrates and rebounds, while a human silhouette, scarcely a shadow, improbable at such an hour, continues along its way... the heavy silence in the heat of the day... Spain? "My Spain" does not feel betrayed.

The canvas changes. It is early morning – or evening perhaps? – the image is the same: the houses, the openings, the human form... The delineating lines are red now. The horizontal band of light is more distinct at the corners of the houses, which appear more massive. Discreetly present, the silhouette slips through the morning coolness or the shade that has finally come. The air is crisp... there is limpidity... freshness... when the village sleeps or is still resting... there could almost be a scent, lingering, a dog's bark punctuating the space...

The experience is repeated as many times as the canvases succeed one another... multiple possibilities play out time and again with the same, with another, orchestrated by an image that is constant, but of varying colours. The highlighted elements translate the interplay from one canvas to the next.

A relational interplay? Music? Variations on a theme? Or why not "series"? "Serial painting"? Image, colours, line, the relationship between colours chosen to express the multiple possibilities... the "happening" of the series in painting?

Be that as it may... how wonderful to savour in abundance this harmony of things, of moments of the day, in ceaseless renewal!

Abundance or multiplicity? Like a nascent regret...

Nothing resembling the terrible ordeal of proliferation, however...

For an instant, the full joy of abundance first received, is disquieted. The series: a way of correcting oneself – of starting afresh? – at the point where the intense masterly work could have, should have, sufficed. Was it not a promise, a life?

Might it be a summer light, "the" light even, revealed by the interplay of possibilities which is the aimed for and coveted object of a serial relationship? Is it really the case when joy is behind the impulse to give in to the invitation...? Not so as to be dissolved in it and in the process the world, but to meet oneself other than one expected, to be dazzled by light, to discover a world shimmering with light... as if by serendipity!

Foreign, strange and yet familiar: a painting often surprises, but sometimes... speaks to you.

"Speaks to you? But what about?" About that which you could not say, that which you would not accept to say, to tell yourself if by any chance you painted, and yet more so, painted "this" painting?

Was it really Spain? A futile question, and more than that, an impertinent question! It was "my" Spain, or rather it would be how I "tell Spain" if I was lucky enough to speak this language.

In the end, it is of no matter whether it is serial or repetitive. But this painting that takes liberties, does it not sit at a pivotal moment in a story? No longer a painting that conceives itself as a marker on the path of the representation of object and space. Nor a painting that believes itself expressive of a veiled and revealed intimacy. Nor again a painting that believes it lends its voice to some idea or feeling seeking a herald. But a painting which addresses us, as speech does, aware that it addresses the other "in their eyes" (FP), that it gives itself over with the only means that painting affords, just as speech does with dialogue. A painting that accepts that no particular meaning is enshrined within it, but has to arise from a potential encounter.

An “open work” then? A work that is open to the way of seeing that takes the prearranged paths, already there, to find a meaning? Would not actively seeing be retelling? No meaning to be identified, no telling or retelling, but speaking with one voice. Painting as a calling. An encounter, where, for oneself, one innovates with the means of painting alone. Just like the artist himself, prove oneself in painting... and then... and then...

Here...  
How to express it?  
This loss of sight  
Where things in turn  
Find a name only afterwards

(FP)

The series: a mere accumulation of related works but where the difference as much as the relationship would underpin what is at stake?

Or rather, more so, a renewed opportunity to rebound from one work to the next? No logic in terms of colour would suffice in advance to structure the whole. Of this, the painter is well aware...

On a blank canvas, a red line, a green line... and then, and afterwards? Everything starts here. There is no precedent, neither of thing nor meaning, of the work that will be born, that will be made. The work happens in the making: just like a transaction, also like a transgression, in which what one was looking for does not know itself, rebounds other than expected and finds meaning... afterwards!

The series? The trace of a movement of the painter where he himself is dazzled by light, tries what he does not know, what is outside his skill. The trace of a movement of the painter: each canvas is a problem and not a simple exercise, even if one excels at it. And in the solution, oh, how tentative, uncertain in its approach, the fleeting, harrowing impression of what one abandons.

A red line... a green line... a chance to see happening what, glimpsed at, offers itself as a challenge... a risk that one takes, as when one takes the floor to speak, of finding – along the way – the thing never before seen, the thing other than expected.

Extracts from an article written by Monique Merly in 1982

*Ruelle avec homme*, Spain

All three works belong to a private collection. Photographs: Haude Pellerin



Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 65 cm, 1975



Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 73 cm, 1972



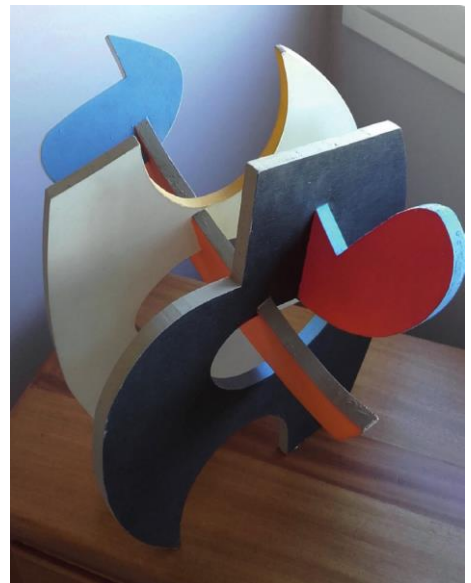
Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 65 cm, 1975



Polychrome *boule*, soldered metal, 30 cm wide x 50 cm high, 1957.  
Private collection. Photograph : Haude Pellerin



*Structure déployée*, polychrome plywood, 38 cm wide x 40 cm high, 1960.  
Private collection. Photograph: Haude Pellerin



Gouache worked in three dimensions, polychrome plywood,  
50 cm wide x 43 cm high, 1970.  
Private collection. Photograph: Haude Pellerin

## FROM ABSTRACTION TO KINETICISM IN PAINTING: HYPOTHESES

Or: **you don't paint a painting!**

(THE SERIES IN THE WORK OF FRANCIS PELLERIN: continued in 2019)

Could we not go further? (than in 1982)

While the image depicts, for example, a place and a shadow-like human form, it seemed that the very principle of the series in the work of Francis Pellerin broke with “representation”, i.e., with a concern for transposing into painting seen or visible reality and the emotions it stirs in different lights (an invisible reality because it falls within the sphere of the sensibility or the intimate self of the viewer). We must, without doubt, learn to distinguish between the “**representation**” of all that can be felt or conceived when the point of departure is seen or visible reality, and the “**abstract creation**” that shows not the visible or the invisible, but that which no eye, no sensibility, could perceive or imagine (even in reaction to the visible!) A creation embracing that which is absolutely alien to what could be thought or felt – the “exovisible” – all the rest is “metaphysics” applied to the visible or the invisible.

That said, the very notion of the series in Pellerin's work is surely not limited to this! We previously referred to a “movement of the painter”, comparable to the speech that responds to what is unpredictably put forward in the course of a dialogue. The movement of the painter induces the same kind of receptivity. We talked about how the series allows a “rebounding”, how it makes possible, even entails, a “passing” from one canvas to another: no single canvas – however exquisite – contains within itself what is sought in these “passings”.

“Passing”? Isn't it this, too, that opens up a way of looking at polychrome sculptures and does not let the work be immobilised in one or other of its aspects? The form is always beyond the bounds of what is revealed for a moment to the eye that welcomes and embraces it, beyond the “seen”. But, while the role of a “passing” is to invite the eye to depart from the “seen”, it is also to introduce what it could not imagine. A “passing” is also the union of what reveals itself and what has been seen: a union that makes them undivided.

If we look at a polychrome sculpture, do we not find such “passings”? Not simply from one form to another (as can be seen with any sculpture), but from a coloured surface to an entirely different proposition of colour and form: what constituted a coloured element “slips” into a proposition of colour and form that is entirely different. A coloured element which shows itself in one perception and the other makes them undivided, thus suggesting “passing” and union as much as abstraction. Abstraction and union support the movement of the eye that contemplates and would love, were it able, to capture each variation of the complete work that moves and transcends.

Could we not hazard the hypothesis that, in a series of paintings, the coloured line that delineates the image has the same intention: to make each canvas at once a unique harmonic proposition between the different elements portrayed, a proposition to “rebound” towards another way of seeing them, and – ultimately – a proposition to embark on a search. A search for that which, by nature, transcends all manner of representation, but is equally a proposition to adopt a movement which was that of the painter and provokes the eye of the beholder?

This hypothesis applies to the series produced by Pellerin between 1970 and 1982. The person viewing a sculpture generally only perceives the work by moving around it. In the same way, when a polychrome sculpture is the object of their gaze, the eye traverses points of transmission rendered in paint, indications of evolution and linkage between the various coloured surprises that the sculpture holds. Pellerin seems to have sought to transpose onto canvas this movement and the abstraction it engenders, by using coloured lines as a **point of departure** and by embracing the creative harmony that they generate, by

**departing from** and not, as in Mondrian's work, by attaining the essence of the seen.

This calls upon the cooperation of the viewer who discovers, their gaze changing from one canvas to another, the work as it evolves gradually with this change. Thus we have a form of **kineticism** in painting, equivalent to kineticism in sculpture: the coloured lines in a painting taking the place of the coloured points of transmission in a polychrome sculpture.

So, what about the series in the art of Francis Pellerin? A quest for kineticism in painting? What definitely breaks with any representation of the seen and also holds, by essence, a certain abstraction: this, yes, indeed! But there is more: a moment of Pellerin's research in painting that renews or echoes his research in sculpture? (The dates are revealing: his polychrome sculptures date from c.1957 and the series of paintings *Ruelle avec homme* from c.1974; we see how painting and sculpture go hand in hand).

To leave the motionless and introduce movement. In other words, kineticism in painting. An entirely renewed way of finding the "thing never seen": never an "object" seen or felt, external to the "movement of the painter". Isn't this how one goes deeper in one's reading of Pellerin's poem, which he often liked to cite from 1973 onwards?

He went wandering  
like masterless dogs  
and found, like a bone,  
the never-seen thing.

**You don't paint a painting!** It simply (!) requires the "viewer" to renounce their perception or their memory so as to acquiesce to the "movement of the painter". This is ultimately the condition for discovering what is at stake. **Not to arrive at abstraction but to proceed from it.** In concrete terms: the painting's coloured delineations prompt the movement of the painter just as much as the quest for a unique harmony; their renewal in another colour leads the viewer's eye to break with any representation that might precede it but at the same time to welcome something beyond the seen or the felt. And going further still, to conceive the *movement* in painting. Everything thus commences with the colour of the delineations, from their renewal which disturbs, but is a catalyst for an entry into the painting. Just as a parable is not a mere symbol that would yield to understanding, but elevates whoever is able read it to the point of revelation of what cannot be imagined, a painting is not to be understood by the yardstick of our inherently human representations but is to be appreciated and welcomed, without enclosing it in any way.

It is this that the series in the work of Francis Pellerin urges us to do!

Monique Merly  
November 2019