

NMT.: I feel incredibly peaceful when I look at your painting. At the same time, the colors reverberate, breathe and radiate an energy that extends way beyond the canvas.

GM.: Early on I felt the need to create a sort of pause, to slow things down a bit – and to show a suspended, almost static moment, a moment of calm. Regarding the colors, I initially used more subdued colors, first on raw canvas and then on a ground that I prepared with white. There were blues and pinks that were almost pastel, and shades of grey and white. Then, I shifted to something more luminous, with more defined shapes and stronger colors.

Like this yellow, for example, which you often use.

I use cadmium yellow with a bit of black. That's what gives that particular shade I use. The choice of color sometimes imposes itself on its own. For example, I'll say to myself that I'd like to make a blue painting, and then I work on defining that blue materially such as I see and sense it. The counterpoint is the gray I use from time to time. I enjoy alternating colors between dense, forceful moments and subtler, more fragile ones.

Color does indeed seem very important in your work and, as you said, your choices have evolved. Recently, in your exhibition at the Parisian gallery Frédéric Lacroix, you use a very pure white on monochromatic grounds of vivid color in either blue, yellow or orange.

In fact, I work a bit like one does with watercolor, that is to say the ground predominates. It's the ground color that provides the luminosity. Yes, one could make that comparison.

In certain works (not the most recent ones but the ones before), you can have the impression, in certain places, that I haven't done anything, that I didn't touch the canvas in any way. But the opposite is true. I don't use ready-prepared canvases that you can find in stores. I like to take charge of the support completely. I've always shaped my own stretchers, fastened my canvases and prepared their surfaces. For me, this is the basis. My relationship to the support – to its

texture, to its color – is crucial in the execution of a piece. I spend a lot of time on it. It defines the space in which the painting is to live.

I felt like going towards something much more massive in terms of paint. I think that's what I do in the recent work that you mention. There, yes, these rather thick grounds are, as you say, blue, a kind of off-yellow, or orange.

The recent colors are surprising for those familiar with your work on white ground. The orange strikes me in particular. Where does it come from?

You know, I don't always know where the colors come from. I can also look for them. One summer I was working on landscapes at the seaside. It was at the beginning of the 1990s, maybe the summer of 1993. I was using paper I had completely covered in orange and onto which I applied shades of grey and white. I liked the result. Maybe that's what I had in mind when I started to work on these works with the orange ground. On the other hand, in those seaside works you couldn't see any of the orange once completed. A vibration remained.

In Matisse's work – well, in my memory at least – there are sometimes grounds like that. I looked at his work a lot when I started to paint. He tended to use pink I think. Those experiments with color are interesting. Then again, I don't think you can draw such direct links between everything. They [the colors] come. That's all.

You entitle your works such as in *Firework (Feu d'artifice)*, *Stadium (Le Stade)*, *Municipal Swimming Pool (La Piscine municipale)* or *Boarder (Frontière)* all from 2008. So the subject remains important even when the composition tends away from purely figurative representation.

Today I give titles to my works. A few years ago, I didn't. I didn't give names to what I was painting. Today I tend to induce a certain degree of interpretation, that's true. The subjects have also become more clearly figurative. When I work, the title comes by itself. I don't insist. At times it doesn't or, at others, it rises to the surface. I don't hide from it. It's like with the colors. I allow it to come.

And maybe also a bit like the shapes you place? One gets the impression they emerge or somehow "rise to the surface" and that when they stay there it's because that's where they are supposed to be. The viewer's gaze is maintained at the surface of your paintings. Even though there are suggestions of perspective, they look very graphic.

Before, at the time when I was making those isolated shapes at the center of a white space, the final composition was very simple, close to a logotype. They had something deliberately naïve about them. This was something I accentuated and wanted.

I had an exhibition a few years ago called *Naïve*, twice [Naïf, deux fois, presented by Pascal Perquis at Galerie Sur Cour and by Véronique Hillereau at Huit Novembre, Paris, 2000] in which I insisted on and really took full responsibility for that aspect. At the time, the compositions were more abstract than they are today.

I think the first motif I painted was a house. It had something a little ridiculous about it. But, at the same time, it felt good painting these little houses. I enjoyed doing it. Today, I don't close myself off, I don't push back motifs that come to my mind whether it's a flag, a path, a bridge or a waterfall. Painting is an adventure.

To be honest, when I first discovered your work, I thought I was looking at completely abstract art. However, you draw upon your memories of very specific places and architectural elements. Once my attention was drawn to this point I did indeed recognize all these elements. So, is your work figurative then?

I don't actually give that much importance to the question of figurative representation versus abstraction. I've always had the sensation of representing something, even when it was something quite tenuous. Now, according to the subject, there's an oscillation between more figurative and more abstract descriptions. Each pole strikes me as being as appealing as it is dangerous. Working on landscape has provided me with the basis for these different phases. A river crossing by boat, a walk through the forest, a house in the country, a swimming pool. They are details that strike me.

They are a starting point. Three things come together in my work: landscapes, the notion of playing, and working on memory. I've also made some portraits. But that's something completely different again. Portraits are even more elusive.

Do you sometimes use photography to capture elements that strike you?

For places in which I've experienced strong moments it isn't enough for me to take a picture of them. It isn't sufficient. I'm not a photographer. What interests me among other things is my relationship to the landscape and this wouldn't be taken into account in any photograph that I could take. I narrate more accurately with painting. There's something about its tactile quality. But I keep pictures that I take and I look at many images, especially on the Internet. I don't use them as such. But they can be useful to me as a catalyst allowing sensations and personal memories to emerge. Sometimes I do take pictures as a part of a visual notebook. The medium (painting, sculpture or photography for example) is chosen according to so many factors. It depends on one's initial contact with it. In fact, for me, my first contact was with watercolors. I saw some at my grandfather's. That lean work – the support, the matter – appealed to me. That's what I started with. In fact, I have a very straightforward approach to technique.

How do you choose the motif that you are going to paint?

I recognize it. I make many drawings and execute painted models. They allow me to delve deeper and refine. Each subject in fact reveals several possibilities.

Generally, I don't necessarily know what I'm going to do when I first start. I feel like working but I don't know where I'm going. Sometimes a motif comes to me immediately, but that isn't always the case. That's when it comes and goes. Or sometimes it gets lost. It has really become an important aspect of my work. I would even say it's almost its core. It's like a dictionary – a dictionary of motifs, of subjects.

When I look at them, I almost feel like I'm there. It reminds me of a place. And that's not all. It also has a meaning on several levels. It can be linked to my personal story. Sometimes there's something almost symbolic or psychological such as with the bridge or the river crossing. At other times, I'm just struck by the motif as such, as with the grain silos and their visible functionality.

Or here, for example, this is a border cabin. That year [that I made that painting], I passed through Switzerland and Belgium and I saw some. These cabins have got something a little ridiculous, obsolete. It made me want to do work around the theme of borders. Another model, however, wouldn't necessarily be the basis for a painting if it weren't "right".

You use the term "model" when speaking of your drawings and studies in which you explore shapes. And then your relationship to architecture, to volume, to playing with perspective is also quite pronounced. I'd be tempted to say that you "build" your pictures with paint.

Have I shown you these small models in balsa wood? This one, for example, is like a roller coaster. It's made from small pieces of balsa wood that I've painted. I started heading for a shape without really knowing that it would turn out to be a roller coaster. I felt like making a shape of some sort, and merry-go-rounds interest me. I started to build, to play with pieces of balsa wood and glue, and in the end it led to a piece of a fairground ride: a roller coaster that doesn't work.

Part of it is painted. So you build your paintings and paint your sculptures.

Well yes, but the sculptures are really peripheral to my painting. They're sort of a game in fact. Even in painting there's a lot of playing within the game of composition. The Bridge, for example, is like a logotype or a toy. When I build, I don't know exactly where I'm going or how I'm going to do it. I know I want to make a boat or a bell tower, for example, but I don't know how. In painting, I pretty much know how I'm going to execute it technically. While here, when constructing with balsa wood, I don't.

Bridges, silos, elements of architecture are all very massive subjects or 'starting points' as you say. The pictorial result, however, has something incredibly light and airy to it.

You have to find a catalyst to painting. The bridge, for example, provides a motive for doing things that interest me. That is to say playing with the notions of near and far, and painting something that is at once very dense and massive but also fragile and tends towards the idea of disappearing.

So, the subject in itself, that is to say the object that provides initial inspiration, is almost an excuse for painting then, is it?

In part, yes. As it happens, my painting often recounts somewhere I've passed through or sometimes it's a mix of two places. When I make a model, I have the impression that I'm passing through something of my own story. So there are several facets. At first sight, one can see something highly simplified, but it can also lead to a much more complex reading. I don't want to put pathos into my work or show something burdensome or sad. At the same time I make works that say something and also say something about me. That's my line. That's what I try to achieve.

Do you think of other artists when you work?
Can one speak of influences or references?

Not necessarily directly, but of course I happen across other painters as I work. By dint of looking at things they become absorbed into you. At times certain things can stimulate and drive me. But I wouldn't

speak of direct influence as such. Maybe in the beginning, but not today after having seen so many artworks. They can be very different things, such as the Sleeping Maid by Vermeer, David Hockney's paintings, or the floral motif of the couch in that big nude by Lucian Freud. Munch used to strike me a lot too, with all that pain that he knew how to render. But he did it without any joy. His canvases suffered in fact. He sometimes left them outside where they were exposed to wind and rain. At the moment, I'm actually spending a lot of time looking at sculpture. Richard Deacon, for example, is an artist that stimulates me a lot. Nash too is someone I look at.

A while ago I saw the Baptism of Christ by Piero della Francesca at the Tate Gallery in London. I was fascinated by that scene from a period in which people believed in something so strongly. Today, it's more complicated.

But it's not about outdoing or re-doing any of that. There are stages in painting which have existed. Italian primitives can be overwhelming, but that isn't the point today. It's not to be outdone. The period in which you paint is really important.

