

Émilie Picard or the troubling falsification of the real

Enter an abandoned garden. Not just any garden, but a huge amusement park that is also home to all kinds of animals. Vibrating to the cries of children and sideshow entertainment during the summer months, it sleeps during the so-called dead season. That's when it becomes a garden whose soul has withdrawn into dark corners, deserting the paths to shrink from sight in secret zones. Strange contrivances remain, artefacts dotted around the garden – giant mushrooms, fake heron, falsely antique barrel organ. Abandoned by visitors, left behind, they stand about, useless, used up, inappropriate, strange. One is not quite sure where one is. It could be here or elsewhere, in Europe or in the depths of some distant land. Any identifying mark disappears in that which stems from pure fabrication and makes this place by turns savannah, wild west, or pond ecosystem.

Such is the terrain in which Émilie Picard's most recent series of paintings is set, a terrain wonderfully well suited to her subject: that of a painting whose focus is not truly the real world but which uses the real as a referent and endows it with the particular features of fakery.

Indeed, while figurative elements appear in the painting, these elements, drawn primarily from the register of the trace, mostly serve as a vocabulary – a vocabulary whose meaning can be left open. And the real world, certainly recognisable but also enigmatic, is recomposed according to a syntax that uses parallels, collages, offsets, rearrangements of forms – all so many tools to re-articulate it disturbingly. The space of representation is itself often reduced to almost a single dimension – not completely so, to continue giving the illusion of the real world, but left no deeper than the gap between two levels of stage scenery.

Thus, this already artificial world of the garden of amusement is sublimated by Émilie Picard's painting, which succeeds in fully bringing out its seductive

ambiguities. The colours, hardly changed from when they come out of tube to be inscribed on the canvas with insolent freedom, these colours of an almost electric vivacity, further enhance the deceptive shimmers of the compositions.

There are painters who work through consolidation. For her part, Émilie Picard works through smudges: the painting is constructed through the piece-by-piece reconstitution of the subject she is working on; it is itself the result of a fabrication.

Here, the brushstroke is quick. So quick that one might think that each painting was constructed in a single gesture as if, rapidly gathering the parts of her subject, the artist left nothing escape from the endeavour to falsify the world. Whole sections of reality are sewn together. And the use of adhesive tape, at the beginning of the work, originally intended to preserve areas left blank, is also a way to geometrize the space in advance in order to hold together the elements that, once extracted from the perceptible world, now belong to the realm of the image.

The whites add to the sense of urgency. They alter the consistency of that which is presented. They remove a part of materiality. They punch holes of light through the film of colour. They flatten the dimensions as in the glare of the sun, our eyes lose the sense of depth.

At the same time, they help to state the enigma of these images, because what characterises them is precisely the fact they slightly shift our attention, causing it to slip from things into an in-between: we would so much like to know what lies behind these fault lines. The true flesh of the world? Or the ropes and pulleys in the theatre wings?

Anne Malherbe, 2016