

Painting Park

On the subject of a series of paintings created during a residence at Dompierre-sur-Besbre, at the Le PAL amusement and animal park, to which the artist had access during the winter closure. What funny-looking figures these mushrooms with orange or green hats that appear in one of Émilie Picard's paintings, *La Cueillette*, as big as bushes and not really at the centre of the image. Strange too, the herons she paints in *Aligator Baie* and *Attendre l'aube*, a little too white, tucked away between fences and huts, as if waiting for a mysterious activation and which, as one may notice if paying close attention, stand not on legs but on metal stands. Likewise, one cannot help but be surprised by the human figure wrapped, Christo-style, in plastic film – *L'Indien* – alongside his similarly frozen horse.

In the series of six works produced at PAL, the subjects chosen and the places attributed to them in the pictorial spaces give one cause to ponder the figurative family to which Émilie Picard belongs. In the young painter's work, it seems that the primary function of the figures is to lend themselves to the power of "imaging material"¹.

Frequented by artists since their invention², Lunaparks and other entertainment utopias provide tacky, desacralised and colourful models to be embellished or massacred at will, making them in any case apt to being embarked on a project with exclusively pictorial concerns. Both minor and attractive, these subjects act as ambassadors for painting while letting it go where it pleases. Whether the big wheel painted by Robert Delaunay in *L'Equipe de Cardiff* (1913), the views of Coney Island captured in the same period by Josef Stella or, later, the cuddly toy pandas of the shooting ranges that feature in Carole Benzaken's canvases depicting the Foire du Trône in Paris (1996-97), artists take hold of these unusual objects in painting to pursue their research on forms, colours and brushstrokes. The same goes for the plastic artefacts adorning the natural and animal environment of the Auvergne amusement park represented in the paintings of Émilie Picard: they are the pretext for a synchronic vision of the different stages of completion of

the pictorial work, from the preserved blanks, the barely sketched leaves up to the scrupulously reproduction of certain details.

Thus, taking the walk through the park and its decorative elements as a starting point, painting tells its own story. Similarly to what Ida Tursic and Wilfried Mille explain about their working method, it is primarily a matter of "being attentive to the internal development of painting in its production"³. Like this couple of painters, Émilie Picard distances herself from her subjects, notably by working from photos she took in the park instead of painting from nature, in order to develop a painting that adheres to its own needs. In this way, she achieves complex compositions, with sometimes heterogeneous areas like quick brushstrokes interrupted by geometric lines, assembled by superimposed layers, such as the curtains on a theatre stage or a succession of windows open on a computer screen.

Finally, within these spaces, many areas are left blank, reminding us of the void that existed before creation, or similarly announcing the fading away of colour as it struggles with the fate of all things to slide into entropy. But here everything takes place in a joy of painting evoked by the candy-pop colours on display.

For Émilie Picard's paintings argue in favour of painting as a comforting space and transfigure the amusement park into a really magical place. Beyond literalness, the figures she depicts celebrate the power of paint: how, after being squeezed out of the tube, thanks to brushes, tape and a flat surface, it comes to create an image.

Vanessa Morisset, 2016

1. Daniel Arasse, *Le Détail*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, 1996, p. 277.

2. See Didier Ottinger's introduction in the *Dreamlands* exhibition catalogue, Centre Pompidou, 2010, p. 17-35.

3. Ida Tursic and Wilfried Mille, "Contamination", talk given during the La Fabrique de la peinture colloquium, Collège de France, 31 October 2014.