

The immobile traveller

The title is borrowed from Fernando Pessoa's biographer, author of *The Book of Intranquility*. There was not a single illustration, let alone an attempt at identification. So thanks to Pessoa, I set out along an imaginary mental path, timeless and far removed from ordinary space. From inside to outside, outside to inside. An incessant coming and going that would sweep everything further, higher if possible. The only necessary journey, vital! In order to stay upright.

The origins of these paintings are two series of drawings from nature. The first, *Roots*, drawn in 2005 in the forest undergrowth near the Rhine (where I spent my childhood). The second, *Stones*, in Côtes d'Armor region in 2006.

On the subject of drawing, Matisse said, «What I have not drawn, I have not seen». While I worked, I thought, «What I have not drawn has not passed through me». The eye alone is not enough. It goes through the hand, the arm, rising like a wave, echoing in the shoulder to settle deep in the thorax. The torso is the resonance chamber and the refuge, the respiratory cage traversed by the world. A crazy accordion. How do you play its score? How do you tune it to the tempo of the stars?

Around twenty studies from nature, reworked in the studio, became the *Metamorphoses* series: vegetable and mineral torsos, reminiscences of other more distant torsos no doubt. Khmer torso carved in stone – a memory of the Guimet Museum. Torsos cut in wood representing the sacrificed Christ that occur and reoccur countless times in Roman and Gothic art. The images of those torsos, buried like archetypes deep in my memory, have been resuscitated by these landscapes. Curious trajectory for these sculptures from antiquity, long-ago divinities standing in a temple or nailed upon a cross. Worn by time, divided by history, they are the mirror of our own nature: presence and disappearance, strength and fragility.

How then is the beauty of the world to be told, how is the great cyclical movement of the seasons to be celebrated?

This question led me to draw the resisting rock-face: my breathing and my pulse tuned to the movement of the tides. Like a standing stone, the torso faces the sea, letting the foam into the depths of its heart, making it circulate to liquefy the blood. To be reborn with every stroke of the pencil, finally perceiving the image that was missing.

Yes! The upright vertical torso puts me in mind of the incantations of Gildas as he stood before the immensity of the ocean. The enigma, however, remains complete.

It was without doubt for that reason that I drew in the penumbra of the forest undergrowth this vegetal labyrinth, a thousand paths leading nowhere, these stumps rooted in the humus. The sap circulates, and sometimes the torso takes root in the tree that touches the clouds. In these forests was lost the man in Caspar David Friedrich's paintings, meditating, with the

world before him. The same questions. But the eye has slid into the landscape it is contemplating. Here the landscape he is looking at has made its nest in his entrails.

Short circuit.

Bites.

Echoless cries.

The enigma remains complete.

All that remains is the wild desire to be there. Upright and alone. These naked torsos are not asking to be saved – simply consoled.

Bites of time.

Jörg Langhans, 2007

(translated by Sahra Bartlett)