

## Jocelyne Alloucherie: An Interview

**René Viau: Drawing, photography, sculpture, painting, installation... Would you say that your practice includes all of these mediums?**

**Jocelyne Alloucherie:** My artistic path is labyrinthine. I can't confine myself to just one medium. In my work I propose image/object/site relationships that belong to anthropological more than aesthetic categories. I try to offer a complex experience, made up of tensions between the often distant memory of singular places and an intimate, immediate awareness of architecture. I'm trying to convey a mixed feeling of presence. Although it's not possible to situate oneself clearly, I'm attempting to position myself (???)between the immediacy of physical experience and the memory of one or many elsewhere.

My recent works *Lames* ["Waves"] and *Occidents* are at once a sequence, a scene and architecture. You can see in it real and metaphorical strolling. Another dimension, this one mythic, comes into it. *Occidents* deals with the deconstruction of a physical, metaphysical and political centre with which the Western world is still obsessed.

In Delphi you can see depictions of the *Omphalos* (the Navel of the world). The object is strange. A man-sized marble mound stands there. The copies are more recent, but the symbol has dominated the site for centuries. It seems to me that through this single image the Greek dictated the future of the entire Western World. Even if the treatment is allusive, *Occidents* most certainly addresses this notion of centre that is central to Western rationalism and so widespread in our urban spaces. *Occidents* also addresses its own dissolution through redundancy, wearing out. It's a figure of implosion.

The photographic sequence of *Occidents* offers various perspectives of city streets. They differ yet they look alike and are of equal value. They reveal an identical way of thinking built space by insisting on its centre and on the thickness of what charts its sides. The *Lames* act differently. The sequence shows chaos, a breath, a primeval sand storm. In this fictive weather, a rhythm is felt. The movement is very close to us. Through hesitation, through intervals between what is close and what is distant, the body in its own way becomes the centre of the world. Again, the evocation is more felt than obvious. It is filtered through gesture and an undecided scale.

**In the space around several of your pieces—where photographs or works calling into play “the photographic” are hung on the wall—white L or U shaped white elements seem to melt into both walls and ceiling. It's aesthetics of fragments but of fragments that recompose. It's as if through mimetism the elements begin to look like the built environment. At the same time, they can also hinder the viewer's gaze or on the contrary act as a sort of viewfinder. How did you come across this kind of ambiguity?**

My U shaped openings are frames that mimic the substrata of a building, which is first and foremost a demarcation from the terrestrial amplitude that shelters us. From this essential definition, I kept only the pillar that delimits a site's perimeter and the threshold that determines its access. It's enough. I think we unconsciously recognize these archetypes. The pillar and threshold can be found at the beginning of any construction and in its ruins.

If the perspectives in *Occidents* end up cancelling each other out, there's always one that will stand out amidst this unavoidable levelling, framed differently by the gaze of someone walking through the work. The sculptural elements—or are they architectural?—propose variously sized openings, angles with changing orientations. It might seem disorderly but the structure is not random. The openings and their rhythm, the thresholds' height and the angulations were slowly

drawn, like visual music, from real-size models. I often say that I dance with my objects before I make a final decision as to their format.

We're talking about ambiguity. It's a quality that I look for, i.e., a given element's ambiguity in terms of meaning or status. It's the potential opening of the work. Ambiguity offers choices, bifurcations. It's a means, a pivot that makes perception and thinking transit from one concept to another, from one element of the work to the next. Ambiguity mainly allows for an engagement with the work beyond one's own limits, since its content or meaning is not revealed at once.

**The U shaped elements in front of the photographs both disrupt and guide the viewer.**

Sometimes, horizontal elements deploy like a fragmented wall or like pedestals. In any case they serve to welcome or distance. They too lead us toward hesitation. Their status seems uncertain. They borrow from the wall without being one. They borrow from the frame, from architecture, without being either. They constitute a metaphorical, functionless architecture, a simple looking device that allows measuring and locating. This is true of all my objects, including the fake lamps that reframe the wide panels of *L'Envers* ["The Other Side"]. They are rather vague reminders of household lamps, yet they have neither their scale nor function.

**Facing the work, we are torn between the "here and now" of the apparatus and the "elsewhere" of the photographic representation. Or is it a metaphor for the *camera obscura* or the camera itself with its wings and mazes, capturing, framing and reproducing a scene at another scale?**

The camera is a first means of theatrical distancing and you can read in the way I set things up a metaphor for the *camera obscura*. They are equally a metaphor for architecture, the near and far, our presence and absence, what is concrete and what can be imagined. Architecture is first and foremost a screen, a wall delimiting the inhabited place of a territory and its opening, a field separating an activity surrounded by an infinitely occupied vastness. This frontier allows a withdrawal into a more private activity with a window that opens onto an elsewhere, dream and poetry, this back-and-forth between what the world has to offer and what we derive from it. What you just said evokes a large model with infinite parallel scales that would exist not only in expanse but also in varying intensities.

**Here, perhaps, the fact that the photograph is part of the piece makes us feel the motion, the tensions at work between it and the space around. The space's neutrality contrasts with the photo's atmospheric quality, with the tumultuous even dramatic range of blacks, whites, greys, their "expressiveness." As if by aphasia, the whites in the image melt into the spaces, often white also, and their architectural elements.**

There is no work without tension and this one results from contrast or, if you prefer, from counterpoint. I work everything in high contrast: object, image, and the space that hosts it. I like pushing their difference up to a certain limit, contrasting fragility and permanence, presence and absence, precariousness and solidity, familiarity and strangeness, transience and constancy. It's the strength of such oppositions that makes the work reach another dimension, very far from a commodity, from "merchandise," from decorative element.

In photography I look for excessive light, the kind that hides or reveals to the extent of pulverizing all points of reference. I like light when it's almost absent or overflowing. In fact, it's within the limits of the light and shade that photography becomes fascinating, that it finds again its first meaning: a drawing in light, an inscription in light, a phantom of the real. It's at this

moment that it unveils hidden properties in things, general traits that escape your attention when they are overshadowed by too many details or an anecdote. It's also then that photography becomes a "genuine" picture, carrying enough generalities and singularities to achieve the double status of image. It's the status of an inner and outer reality that is inscribed in memory and ready to show itself anew against another backdrop of reality—a reality that reveals itself as much as it reveals. Elusive, the image has more to do with representation than figuration. In this sense, a photograph is not necessarily an image.

**The volumes seem to be telling us what to look at, where the intervention is more clearly etched, more drawn. Look at the photograph, at the piece of paper! They're showing us what it is they're framing, yet they are contradicting it. Everything rests on closures and openings, on how things are presented within the mode of presentation. Relationships are created. Different sequences appear within the work, as if we're asked to look at them until we really see them...**

... or until you somehow take the measure of yourself through the work's measure. Its various components offer multiple readings that ideally compel you to stop. This time factor allows the piece to make its way into your imagination, circulate within your memory, and become complicit with your mind's free flow. You go back to it. You think about it. The exact meaning of the proposal is never entirely given. It's there but it lives in absence. It shows itself. It vanishes into another possibility.

**With this kind of shifting, we're both in the discontinuity and refocusing of the experience.**

I'm looking for a cut in what's linear, an intrusion in what's contiguous. Parallel levels of reference follow their course, move away, move closer and sometimes merge or eliminate each other. Contiguity results from the stratification of multiple experiences, the possibility of jumps and shifts in the regime of imagination. It's the advent of an unlimited metaphorical structure. Contiguity is not only the result of various stratified references. It operates in a roundabout way, through ruptures. It takes shape through the rhythms produced by the varying intensities of the mediums brought into contact, much like a composer with musical instruments or a writer with characters. An element disappears and makes room for another, only to better resurface. Nothing works simultaneously between the important sculptural masses and a photograph. For the meeting to occur, you often have to decrease the photographic medium's specificity, or the opposite. You have to decrease, increase, change scale and substance. If I simply juxtapose both mediums, maintaining their own and utmost specificity, what I get is the superficial superposition of two levels of representation that never meet.

**The parameters of presentation indicate that it's possible to go beyond. They also suggest scale, space. They also make us think about the negation of any definitive conclusion, of any authority in the image kingdom. Moreover, I see them as a way of integrating the walls and the ground, of reinterpreting the notion of hanging, of setting up fresh passageways between physical space, what is there, installation, sculpture and a form of "knowledge" stemming perhaps from the pictorial. But here, as opposed to painting, the work is not isolated by space but rather accessed through it.**

This knowledge stemming from the pictorial has to do with an acknowledgement of the visual limits between concrete and abstract space, immanence and transcendence, the real and the imaginary. It seems to me that the practice of painting or drawing leads to this knowledge. It is

learned through the slowness of the gaze, a gesture of the hand. In art every tension and every event take place in the working out of limits, their passageways, their transgressions, their shifts. It's truly at these thresholds that tensions between things, disciplines and mediums are inscribed. With drawing I learn to address differences with a light touch. The *Lames* are in fact ephemeral drawings of sand blown on photographs and digitally captured. Drawing is also of use to me in photography since I consider it as a cutout from reality. I remove. I draw against this background of reality in front of me. I pay close attention to the line that will determine the inclusion of what will be part of the shot. The first gesture is as decisive as a pencil stroke. The negative or recording must render what I felt, what I gathered with my eye, what I framed with all my mobility. The points of view are often those of a stroller, taken vertically during a walk. Accurate or not, this first gesture cannot be remade. If it surprises me, I keep it despite possible technical imperfections. I try to do the same with the space that will host and give access to the work. The issue is more difficult in this case. I'm playing with more complex levels. The counterpoint then takes more importance. Sometimes, a single photographic image will be enough to occupy an unusual site.

**I remember the first pieces I saw of your work around 1978-1980. They combined the immutability of stele-like shapes, thus a sort of sculptural and architectural formatting, with drawing or, rather, with fleeting lines that were captured in the moment.**

They were precarious architectures, scores that recalled immutability. Their surfaces carried a quick drawing, at times deliberately awkward. I wanted to change the so-called site of painting where it was being safely kept. I was questioning the linearity of thinking and how to escape it. So I was attempting to reverse a number of things. And minimal art was everywhere. I saw a Donald Judd show that started me thinking. I was moved by the richness of the direct experience it triggered. Moreover, I felt strangely ill at ease. It was as if I had been cut off from an important part of myself, enclosed in a strange promiscuity between my mind and the object. I had the feeling that I was deprived of my entire memory. Time was contracting in the immediacy of experience. I thought I might have to find a way out without having to come back to slavish figuration, to a worn-out and obvious symbolism. Above all, I wanted to escape the usual figuration/abstraction, objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy, knowing that these poles are never absolute and that they can always reverse through the unavoidable work of evocation. There was also the Italian influence, *Arte Povera* and an interest in the open work as supported by the philosophical school of Turin. This opening onto all the layers of imagination can only be produced through evocation, i.e., the subtle work of the image understood as a complex reality with a two-fold, inner and outer, existence.

**In this evocation, I also see a musing on space in the sense of Bachelard's poetics of space—the capacity to move from a private world to an open space.**

I let myself be swept along by a longing for what is far away, unknown, just as much as I like to come back and look at something familiar with a fresh look, from the point of view of strangeness. It's like measuring oneself. One image doesn't satisfy me. The same goes for an object. I'm fascinated by what it draws me to, another site for imagining and thinking. I'm interested in a path, crossroads, a labyrinth. And it always remains mysteriously unpredictable and unfinished.

Translated from the French by Colette Tougas