

14h sur le lit*

Simon Martin lays on the canvas, the substance of what he loves. People, flowers, the rest, share the same languidness, recorded on surfaces with chalky ranges, with a thoroughly mineral sensuality. Through painting, he transforms the moment into imagery, using a fiercely photographic strategy, to do with writing through light. A form of sunlight is thus set to work by way of radiant marks which the painter composes on his film of flax. They imprint an emotionless sentimentality. The sugary dreamlike quality which is released possibly comes from this time-frame peculiar to pictures lit up by still unknown stars. Day and night.

Day. Shadows appear clearer than the obstacles which create them, a phenomenon which upsets the traditional daytime vision. Solarization, cherished by avant-garde photographers, also describes an agricultural method for cultivating the fertility of a plot of land. Here and there, the rays end up caught by membranes. Life perspires.

Night. It is at this moment that this comes to pass. In a small family home open to the winds, the artist gets busy when the others are sleeping. And his models in particular. If he only depicts his close circle, this is because a relation of trust must exist if his subjects are to abandon themselves. Thus is the slumber of things immortalized.

Day. Rocky voluptuousness, tangible everywhere, is rooted as much in the concrete of suburbs as Mediterranean stone, two quintessential environments for anyone trying to situate these works. The surfaces of walls still scorched by the summer are also the possible surface for frescoes, be they Italian or made in the Ile-de-France. A periphery of representation is asserted.

Night. Because identities are erased, and the half-light contributes to this. There may be faces but never any portraits. So the brush bypasses verisimilitude, the caress. Despite their stunning erotic content, the images stubbornly remain demure. This rare restraint fills the formats with an original desire. Its imprint seduces without realizing it is coy.

Day. Scenes burst forth with a sunlike confidence. It is not a matter of being bored, once the anatomy has been placed. And if details are not necessary, they vanish in a piece of clarity. Whence the rendered, not to say brittle, look of certain areas displaying a texture of trowelled plaster. Vast dazzles are freed, once the darkness has been sanded.

Night. There is a lot of grey, a word that is far too concise to grasp the depths of its plural. These latter form a bonding agent which permits the pastel hues of the flesh to hold, while celebrating a ghostly dimension. Their silvery reflections arouse silvery experiments, of those epidermises touched by the even nocturnal gleams.

Simon Martin draws up on the canvas the substance of what he loves. People, flowers, the rest, share a similar vigour, gathered in silence in the description of all these layers which form it, including those we no longer see. Consumed by their extended exhibition, bodies remain under the passing of hours, preferably prone. These motifs of passiveness irritate precipitation, which has become the standard of our flows. They impose an impertinent respite, in the blue cool of the morning, in the pink softness of the afternoon. So onto our retina, each painting offloads an electric impulse, using a style which manages to prolong the bedazzlement forever. Day and night.

Joël Riff, 2020
translated from the French by Simon Pleasance

* 2pm on the bed