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TALKING WITH THE SWISS PAINTER NICOLAS PARTY

by Federica Tattoli



Nicolas Party, Installation view

Party's background as a graffiti artist gives his art both a particular sense of modern design culture and an ability to effortlessly manipulate scale and context. Moving from interior to outdoor projects and from small to large scale, he does so with a lightness of touch that energizes what are often highly traditional subjects such as still life and portraiture. Many of Party's exhibitions feature brightly colored wall paintings formed of repeated patterns. They command space and connect the different forms of work on display. In turn they also remind us of the artist's physical presence within the gallery. At Palazzo Antinori in Florence, on the occasion of the acquisition of the site-specific project Giant Fruit, Nicolas Party presents a series of works produced between 2013 and 2016. Set of six paintings - three new watercolors and three stone-carving - that illustrate how the kind of Still Life is now more than ever alive and capable of conveying emotion.

The artist reclaims ironically traditional iconography. His works transparently reveal how well the values of composition and color balance are reinvented, completely transformed and translated into the contemporary, to preserve the effectiveness of the investigation.

Why and when do you choose painting as your elected media?

Like many children, I spent a lot of time painting and drawing, and I really loved it. I think what makes drawing so magical for a kid is maybe its capacity to allow you to build an imaginary space in the most simple way. You just need a simple piece of white paper and a pencil, and if you draw a circle on the white paper, then the white space is a sky. By the simplest and quickest gesture you can create a world that is wholly yours. There is no need for fully developed skills to enact the most incredible magic tricks. Just a pencil and a piece of paper.

Could you tell me something about the wall painting "Giant Fruit" you did at Cantina Antinori?

Working in such a particular space was very challenging. I wanted to create something that

would contrast with the very harmonious environment. To bring a flash of color into the calm tones of brown and beige. Everything there is one type of aesthetic, and I hope my artwork will act as a sort of visual break. At Cantina there is a strong desire to mix tradition and innovation. Those ideas are imperative to me and I was trying to create something that would work that way.

I used bright colors and cartoonish shapes to create a big still lifes. The use of the spray paint was also an interesting medium in that context.

Regarding the Antinori Art Project you inaugurate a very special solo show in the “boschereccia” of the Palazzo Antinori in Florence, could you briefly describe me the project?

In that particular space, all the wall are decorated with 18th-century fresco that represents the Tuscan countryside. We decided to show three pastels on top of the fresco. I very often paint a mural and then hang my painting on top of it so this time was very special to see my work in front of a fresco made by another artist. We had to find a way to hang the painting, because we couldn't drill holes into the fresco. We used old books from the bookshelf in the space to create a sort of plinth for the painting. I think it worked pretty well as an interesting way to play with space.

Unique piece and decoration, perspective and two-dimensionality, could you tell me something about this relationship?

When I do a show, I see the paintings as characters that will act in a play. The gallery space become a stage set. So each show I see myself as a sort of director that needs to choose what the set will look like and what the characters will say to each other.

Could you tell me something about your way to use colors and choose subjects?

I'm trying to work with subjects that are not original. Subjects that have been, and still are, painted all the time. Like a portrait, or a cat. What fascinates me about these topics is their capacity to regenerate themselves at any period of history, and still be relevant to us. It's a little bit like how during the pre-renaissance period every painter had to paint the same subject. Every painter was painting an annunciation. But some are much more interesting than others. I also believe some subjects are always painted because they are an infinite source of meaning and inspiration. Looking at, and painting a tree, will always be something meaningful and inspiring. That will never change.

Where do you make your works?

I have my main studio in Bruxelles, but I also have a space in New York.

What can't be missing from your worktable?

I always listening to a podcast when I work, so a very important object for me is a device to play podcasts.

A collection you wish at least one work of yours was part of?

I'd like to have my work in a room with some of my favorite artists. For example, a room with Leon Spiellart, Hans Emmeneger, Giorgio Morandi and Cuno Amiet.

A museum where you'd like to have an exhibition?

The Foundation Beyeler in Basel is such a beautiful museum in which to show paintings.

Day or night?

I like both; I like Magritte.

A question you've never been asked but one you've always wanted to answer?

It's a giraffe that's escaped from a zoo in Germany.

Could you briefly describe one of your latest works?

I just did a portrait of a man with blonde hair with a cherry that hangs from his left ear.

What are you reading?

"L'affaire Arnolfini" Jean-Philippe Postel.

A film?

Sans Soleil by Chris Marker.

Where would you like to live?

I'm quite happy where I am now.

Do you have reference artists? Artists you'd like to work with?

Living in Belgium, I have been looking at a lot of Belgium art in all the museums and churches. Belgium has an active and fascinating art history. To name few of the artists that I'm looking at the moment: Leon Spilleart, William Negouve de Nuncques, Fernand Knopf.

In the more contemporary art world - but those making an echo of the artists named before -, I like Victor Mann's paintings.

A project, related to art, that you'd like to do?

I would like to do children's books and sets for the opera or theater.

If you weren't an artist, what job would you like?

An art historian that specializes in paintings of animals.

Let's imagine a group show. Who would you like to exhibit with?

Cuno Amiet, Felix Vallotton, Leon Spilleart, William Negouve de Nuncques and Hans Emme-
negger.

Yes or no to curators? If yes, who would you choose?

Very importantly in the art world now, curators initiate conversations between works and artists. They are an essential part of the artwork these days. I did a show at the Hammer Museum in LA, curated by Ali Subotnick. She had a lot of great input that was very inspiring to me, and that made the show better than it would otherwise have been.

A dream of yours?

I'd love to do a fresco.