

JEAN-BAPTISTE BERNADET

BY JILL GASPARINA, 2010

"*I will Run after You*", "*Now*", "*Yeah*", "*Too fast for Love*", "*I've lost my Illusions*", "*I want Muscles*". Somewhere between figurative and abstract art, words and text made their way into paintings. Jean-Baptiste Bernadet made that choice for his work. "I had a hard time figuring out how to clearly address the viewer, words helped me to achieve this" But why choose English? Why those *clichés*? "I feel like rock musicians who sing in English," says the French painter who has been living in Brussels for the last 10 years.

This reference to music is quite telling. Dan Graham has been extensively writing about what he calls rock bands' schizophrenia, explaining how they were torn between the demands of the deeply mercantile industry they belonged to and the authentic desire they had to make significant music that criticises society. This diagnosis can still be validly applied to the issue of the artist positioning himself and his work within the art market. Jean-Baptiste Bernadet's paintings show dazzling colors standing out on a dark background; they re-enact, up to a certain point, the "dark" attitude of punk musicians. They address the viewer directly. "One always feels rejected at first by my paintings," the artist admits. But he adds that "the surface is sensitive, rich, precious and complex enough for the viewer to enjoy it," and to leave that attitude behind. Beyond these general considerations, the artist's interest in "the almost insincere side" could actually be a way of breaking away from the orthodoxy of expressionist painting. Jean-Baptiste Bernadet explains his work comes close to a kind of "autofiction". The narrative of the painter while he paints merges with the mental projections of the viewers. Bernadet is not too personal and lyrical, not too decorative or ironic about the history of painting; he stands in an in-between place where he can be seen, and appropriated, by every viewer.

This third way is manifest in the form of his paintings. Despite the visible *pentimenti*, despite the numerous layers of different materials that the artist applies over and over again on his canvases while waiting for his next exhibition, JBB's work is not only improvised: the artist paints and sees "what is forthcoming", but the painting is only finished when working on many levels. "My paintings have a quick, splashed and exhausted aspect that counterbalances a series of decisions made to enrich my painting, to make it more appealing", the artist explains to Clément Diré. (...)

Painting was considered impossible in the 80s. That pervading impossibility has been explored in various ways by the artists of that generation. Steven Parrino chose necrophilia. Josh Smith has been constructing abstract imagery with his own name, tirelessly and in huge quantities. Jean-Baptiste Bernadet directly inherits that history, he describes his paintings as "remains" outliving his certitude of never achieving a masterpiece. The rich, precious and complex surface of his paintings should be sufficient, definitely.

For his exhibition in the Project Room of the Baronian-Francey gallery, Jean-Bapiste Bernadet will show a group of five recent paintings under the title "Never Forgive, Never Forget". This title comes from one of the exhibited paintings, and it provides — as always with the artist — various possible interpretations: an introspective examination of the course of his art, a reflexive examination of art history, and a summons whose object and logic is left unspecified.