

# LA RÉPUBLIQUE { de l'art }

Mathieu Cherkit

January 7, 2014



*Circulation intérieure* (Inner circulation) is the title of Mathieu Cherkit's new exhibition held at the Jean Brolly Gallery through February 15: "Inner," because the young artist (born in 82) within the house he lives with his parents and grandparents, in Saint-Cloud; and "circulation" because his work circulates from one room to another, in the same way that one circulates the interior of his paintings, which ceaselessly complement each other and return from one to the other. One might think, then, that we are dealing with a conceptual approach like we can find in Gregor Schneider's art, which seeks to transform its living space in many different ways - and somewhat schizophrenically - but this is not the case. The artist does not work in this line. "If I mainly paint this house," he explains, "it's primarily for practical reasons, because that's the first thing I have at hand. There is no protocol on my part, just the fact that, as I do not paint from pictures but directly, I need to see the things I represent. But I'm not the first one to do that. Many painters before me, like Monet or Matisse, have essentially painted their interior. In a house things change, nothing is ever the same depending on the light, the season or the time of day. And the house itself evolves. As for the title of the exhibition, it results more from a collective decision than from a will to affirm something. It is more the desire to make the panorama of a given period, without seeking to guide the viewer too much towards a specific subject.



For it is painting, this struggle with the canvas, this struggle with matter, which interests the young man above all. He was not born into an artist's family, even though his mother often took him to the museum, he had a medium-sized education, and even begun a second year of law which he was bored by. With a sentimental disappointment, he wondered what he would do with his life if painting, which he was passionate about (he had begun with collages), would appear as an outlet. After a year of preparation at the Sèvres workshops, he entered the Fine Art School of Nantes where he did not find his place completely in an environment

where an emphasis on minimalism reigned. But in his fourth year of study he had the opportunity to go to Germany to the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig, where painters such as Neo Rauch, Matthias Weischer and David Schnell, that is to say, painters who never broke with the figurative tradition, and benefited from the technique that was acquired in the former schools of the East and took advantage of modernity. He was only six months in Leipzig, and not even in direct contact with Neo Rauch, but these six months had a decisive influence on his work. They strengthened him in his pleasure of painting without guilt, gave him the taste for the thick and granular material that differentiates painting from the mere manufacture of an image (hence the overflowing of the frame that still characterizes his current canvases) and it led to wonder how to make an effective figurative painting today.

Subsequently, Mathieu Cherkit sought to stand out from this school in Leipzig, especially by looking at the work of David Hockney who "protected" Matthias Weischer. And the grand English painter, he will keep the same false awkwardness of the line that hides a great virtuosity, the same sense of humor a bit tongue-in-cheek, the same taste of the assembly of colors that does not fear the overload nor the decoration. Above all, this vocabulary of the painter will be consolidated. Because the elements of the house that Cherkit paints to infinity are basically only a repertoire of forms that he arranges as he pleases according to the rules of chromatic balance, harmony or complementation. In some paintings, such as *Bing Bang* reproduced here, we see some color charts that are unrealistic and that seem to distribute the range that is the base of the painting. In other paintings, it is a detail, not always in the foreground, that gives the pattern that is found in many other places of the composition. And often, large monochrome areas also introduce a part of abstraction in the painting and create a tension with the figurative elements that are represented, as if, in the end, the differences between these two forms of painting are exceeded. "Renew the painting, not the subject," is the ambition of the artist.

But unlike other figurative painters who sought to evacuate the subject (such as Baselitz, who toppled to show that it was not what was important in his work), Mathieu Cherkit, remains attached to figuration. "I will not feel comfortable in this ambiguous stance," he says. A figuration that is also a nostalgic and tender look at an era (the house dates from the late nineteenth century and it used to be the composer Florent Schmitt's country house) and the objects found there (the clocks of his grandfather, for example). "I like that art is accessible to the greatest number." As Matisse, a painter to whom he often refers to, said: "painting is a sofa for the eyes." But this figuration is not completely orthodox either, because the perspectives are truncated there, strange objects are implemented, walls are distorted. In fact, the artist mentally reconstructs the family home, and he creates pieces that do not really exist, joins together spaces that are not completely connected. One of his specialties is to use two canvases placed like a diptych to constitute a larger painting, both for practical reasons (a canvas of more than two meters would not return home), but also to bring different points of views of the same object, like in Cubism where the same subject is seen simultaneously from different angles (Hockney, in a tribute to cubism, also used this technique).



We must be wary of this too simple painting to be honest, too immediate not to hide secret backgrounds. In fact, Mathieu Cherkit often gives clues that suggest that things that are less harmless than what we might first believe happened here. But of the author of the crime, we know nothing more. Because the human figure is most often absent from these paintings. It appears, however, in the latter, but in the form of a hand that is smoking or a body that is partly hidden. And when you see it entirely, it seems a little fixed, mechanical, like an object in the middle of others. Perhaps because it is more difficult to cheat with human expression and it would be, for the moment, too expressive for the young man. He prefers to stick to objects and places, more interchangeable, more discreet, but also more misleading...

*Circulation intérieure*, January 9 - February 15, 2014 at galerie Jean Brolly, 16 rue de Montmorency, 75003 Paris ([www.jeanbrolly.com](http://www.jeanbrolly.com))

Images : Mathieu Cherkit, *Bing Bang*, 2013, oil on canvas, 200×380 cm; *Poisson vert*, 2013, oil on canvas, 130×97 cm ; *La Descente*, 2013, oil on canvas, 40×40 cm.