We do not know what a face looks like: from behind, it looks like a kind of stump with hair. Owls, on the other hand, look us straight in the face. They turn their heads 360°, like windmills pivoting to place their wings facing the wind. In reality, their eyes are so big that they cannot move within their sockets.

Biting nails, having back pain... are psychosomatic effects of anxiety caused by social relationships. In her book "The Body Never Lies" (2004), psychoanalyst Alice Miller recounts that Galileo nearly went blind the day the Church condemned him to recant the truth (the scientific confirmation that the Earth is round). The owl flying in daylight would be the negative twin of the scientist recanting the truth; what it sees, we cannot see, and vice versa.

Is there a point where one can become the other? And does cowardice exist only because we have the physical ability to look away?

This phenomenon is described in Michel Delpech's song, "Le chasseur" (1974): through the power of his imagination (and his guilt), the narrator puts himself in the place of his prey, a wild goose, to the point of envying it for its freedom. He also sings, in "Le Loir-et-Cher," about his family's resentment, accusing him of spending weeks "without seeing a horse or an owl." Obviously, I prefer to have fun quoting Delpech rather than Mircea Eliade because theoretical writing tells us nothing about the real experience of identification. The role played by figuration, particularly the animal representation in painting, is that of Michel Delpech with his song: leaving a place for the viewer.

In his painting "The Fox in the Trap" (1860), Gustave Courbet, himself a hunter, adopted the same ambivalence as the pop singer: by depicting this fox in the snow splattered with blood, its paw caught in the jaws of a metal trap, the painter overturns the Christ-like allegory of religious painting and gives us a realistic image of the hunt. Through the spectacle of suffering, he paradoxically offers the viewer the possibility of feeling empathy for the depicted animal and of placing themselves in the subject's point of view.

In the 19th century, the realist movement greatly contributed to revaluing the place of the animal as such (and not as a symbol or allegory), as evidenced by the success of Rosa Bonheur's paintings. In general, animal representation remains a central element of popular culture, despite the fact that human societies continue to treat animals primarily as agricultural and food resources. Representation is not enough. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that drives Tristan Chinal-Dargent to move away from naturalism towards science fiction.

Science fiction and mannerist painting have in common the distortion of reality. Pontormo's figures are exaggeratedly muscular or dynamic. El Greco's figures are so elongated that they seem to flicker like flames. In addition to modifying bodies under technological pretexts, science fiction stretches reality across space and time. In "Star Wars," for example, the action takes place "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" (which can be heard as "once upon a time").

Several of Tristan's paintings use on-set photographs found on the internet as a starting point. These backstage photos, in which actors amuse themselves with the grotesque and terrifying nature of their costumes, overturn the illusionistic character of fiction: the special effects that must be taken seriously within the narrative are mocked. What these paintings seem to tell us is that we take their subject too seriously. Too much or not enough, as my reference to mannerism suggests. It is not only a question of highlighting the analogy between the animal figure and that of the monster, the robot, or the alien, but also of reminding us that this categorization exists only from a human perspective. Tristan's work actually focuses on the human gaze's inability to accept the other with its limit.

In science fiction films, the human species is obsessed with the idea of linguistic contact with life forms, and thus with the question of translation ("Close Encounters of the Third Kind," "Arrival"...). Similarly, making animals talk is a leitmotif found throughout children's culture. In "Alien," at least, contact is reduced to a physical confrontation. This "civilizing" reflex undoubtedly relates to the colonial narrative of the "discovery" of the New World but omits the tragic dimension of this behavior. This is what Tim Burton plays with in "Mars Attacks!" with his little green men "coming in peace." Through the non-verbal, we enter into a limited but equitable relationship with the other, and painting can offer a literal analogy. It is to the literality of the living that the literality of painting responds.

Tristan Chinal-Dargent uses scraps of wooden cardboard recovered from the framer. These unusable, out-of-proportion rectangles, because they are too elongated or convoluted, are painted with Indian ink, using a brush. Often, the subject is both suggested by and trapped within the support: a bird unfolds a disproportionately long wing (at least as long as the spine of Ingres' "The Grand Odalisque"), another curls under the clumsy arch left by a laborious cutter stroke. In several portraits made from photos, Philip K. Dick appears so crushed that one might think they are seeing the master of American science fiction through the eyes of his own paranoia.

"The Owl in Daylight" is the title of Philip K. Dick's unfinished novel. The owl has no choice but to look you in the eyes, and it is the animal the artist has chosen as the totem of this exhibition. This "camera look" reminds me of the reaction of the painting in Ad Reinhardt's famous cartoon: to a viewer mocking an abstract painting ("Ha ha, what does this represent?"), the same painting angrily responds: "What do you represent!" Nothing proves that works of art cannot defend themselves, nor even that they have peaceful intentions. We can only know this by confronting them concretely, without trying to make them say what we would like to hear.

text written for the exhibition AS AN OWL IN THE DAYLIGHT - 2024, La BF15, Lyon - FR