

November 23
December 21, 2024

Opening
Saturday, November 23, 2024
from 11am to 8pm

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Hugo Capron

And Suddenly, a Phrase Resurfaced...¹

During our conversation, a phrase suddenly resurfaced. Or rather, a title: that of an exhibition—and what an exhibition it was! And above all, what a title: “Une exposition de peinture réunissant certains peintres qui mettraient la peinture en question” [An Exhibition Bringing Together Certain Painters Who Seek to Challenge the Notion of Painting].² It took place in 1973, before the birth of Hugo Capron. Yet it was here that it all began.

In the early years of his practice, Hugo Capron’s painting was very different. In his own words, his painting was rather “minimalist.” He entered the world of art through printing and exchanged technical college for art school. He was obliged to make this choice, on his own, to choose this pathway that we might take for granted, if we don’t take the time to reflect a little more. We don’t all necessarily live in a world bathed in art, and, on the contrary, we might all too rapidly come to the conclusion that the impermeability of this particular world and its forms might exclude those whose practice was not preceded by an assiduous attendance of exhibitions and museums. Images however, whatever their provenance, spread more widely and rapidly than our own assumptions would lead us to believe.

When Hugo Capron was at the School of Fine Arts in Dijon, he often exchanged with Didier Marcel, who teaches there; who is a sculptor not a painter and who also developed his current work through different forms that lodged themselves in the interstitial—which we might also refer to as the *inframince*³ [the infra-thin].⁴ We could also mention Rémy Zaugg, who for Hugo Capron represents both the pinnacle to strive for and a starting point, even if it may not seem that way.

It was a similar circuitous route of highways and byways that led Hugo Capron to Japan, as a resident at the Kujoyama Villa. If you think carefully, it’s easy to imagine why he chose this path. Paper and printing, the exceptional preservation of ancient techniques, of which Japan, more than any other country has become the repository. And this, *a posteriori* explains why this voyage was a necessity.⁵ Sometimes, like Bissière who went to Algiers to learn painting, or Michaux who travelled to Ecuador and then Asia to rediscover writing, you have to know when it’s time to set sail.

There is an art in knowing how to travel and discover. Coming home is also part of the learning process.

Who would have believed that at the beginning of the 21st century, in the same way as at that of the 20th century, painters would turn to Japanese prints as a novel source of inspiration? Everything is recycled, but nothing is repeated. Each supposedly mandatory rite of passage, has suddenly become an obstacle to be sidestepped, while the unforeseen, the unpredictable, can be transformed into an absolute imperative. This has been the case for Hugo Capron on several occasions, and another unexpected turn in his career came about shortly afterwards. In 2022, he joined Semiose, originally a publishing house that was reborn as a gallery, thanks to the Révélation Emerige grant.⁶

But let’s get back to the painter and his painting. Can you see the correlation between his Feux d’artifice [fireworks] series of paintings and vintage images

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1. This text is the introduction to an essay for an upcoming catalog.
2. An exhibition organised by Michel Claura and René Denizot, at 16 Place Vendôme, Paris, from 29 May through 23 June 1973, featuring Daniel Burién, Alan Charlton, Giorgio Griffa, Bernd Lohaus, Brice Marden, Agnes Martin, Palermo, Robert Ryman and Niele Toroni.
3. Like the reference to Malevich's *Red Cavalry* (1928-1932), in the abstract lines of the carpet which the public crossed at Didier Marcel's exhibition, which we co-organized in 2010 at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris.
4. Translator's note: a term coined by Marcel Duchamp referring to ephemeral, ultra-thin and undecidable phenomena, such as the warmth that remains on a chair when someone gets up.
5. His residency at the Kujoyama villa followed an Erasmus exchange with Japan, which ultimately led to the jury's decision to award the artist the place he coveted so much.
6. The Révélation Emerige grant was inaugurated in 2014 at the instigation of Laurent Dumas, Chairman of the Emerige Group. It is a program dedicated to supporting talented young artists of the French scene.
7. Silkscreen created by Tadanori Yokoo for Yukio Mishima's essay *The Aesthetics of End* (1966). It shows a young blonde woman riding a locomotive bedecked with flowers, ploughing through the waves, its plume of smoke rising into a sky lit by a golden sun.
8. Correspondence by e-mail with Hugo Capron, 28 October 2024.

from Japan? We should look, he tells us, at the posters by the graphic designer and visual artist Tadanori Yokoo; in particular at the one that refers to the writer Yukio Mishima⁷—another of Hugo Capron's inspirational sources, another point of departure and culmination, who, upon Capron's arrival in Japan led him to visit the port of Shimoda, to the hotel where Mishima stayed, but “whose room unfortunately no longer exists.”⁸

So, what can we actually see? Where is Tadanori Yokoo's locomotive taking us? Undoubtedly to another harbor, where the waves have no choice but to encroach on the land—and then again, some of Hugo Capron's paintings also show waves, don't they? And if you look closely, the sun illuminating the poster, which also evokes other schematic, standardized Asian depictions of the sun, functions as a sign from which the paintings of Moustiques [Mosquitos] you are about to see, barely distance themselves.

“Mosquitos?” You say to yourselves. With a capital M, as biologists might refer to them.

The first time we spoke of the paintings, I didn't see the mosquitos, I only saw the brush-strokes and the colors. No doubt this was how the artist wanted us to approach them. Via the strokes. That which fills the canvas makes us forget the starting point, yet two dark circles and a larger, lighter one are there to remind us. Nevertheless, even after identifying the true subject, we are still able to simply consider the canvas from a purely pictorial, abstract point of view. In this very distance between what we see and what the artist intends, we are drawn back to the early days of his work, to that prehistory when he pursued radical abstraction. Will the temporal bridge thus formed be spanned by this second series: a basket of lemons, or a tray as Hugo Capron prefers to call it? Unlike the *Mosquitos*, the image is immediately readable—a bit too immediately for us not to consider it, in turn, as pure pretext. The game of illusions had to continue a little longer, with nothing put forward in a truly straightforward manner, nothing given away; the clarity of forms had once again to dissolve into a kind of ideogram, just for the sheer pleasure of the game.

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