

## Press release

June 25th  
August 13th, 2022Opening  
Saturday, June 25th  
from 11am to 8pm*Dolphin Derby*  
Hugo Capron

I don't believe that Hugo Capron feels the slightest affection for the "subjects" of his paintings. He has nothing in common with the fireworks, shrimps or lemon trees, nor with the more recent rivers. Perhaps he has a lemon tree or maybe he likes eating shrimps... One thing is certain: his painting is not autobiographical. Moreover, these things are not really subjects as such, they are more like motifs.

Fortunately, his painting is not a statement about the world—no more than it is about the artist himself. It has nothing to tell us about society, about our present, about us and how we should behave, dress, vote, think, or heat and feed ourselves; it doesn't argue with indignation for any particular cause nor dictate what might be seen as appropriate behavior. You are free to reflect on ecology, whilst looking at his rivers—this is where we often find ourselves today, searching for an absolute meaning. Otherwise what would be the point of art?

His "motifs" are not chosen lightly, but rather because of what they allow and the vocabulary they permit him to use: his choice is more a question of formal rather than semantic qualities. The shrimp has certain attributes: two bulging eyes that form perfectly spherical shapes, almost graphic in nature like two punctuation marks; a supple body whose flexibility is unrestricted and whose transparency brings its own share of representational problems; antennae that offer up two versatile lines that are an invitation to draw (they have given rise to colored loops of the sort that can be seen in the painting of Josh Smith); their aquatic habitat, which allows for an almost infinite range of colors, etc.

When animals take on the role of subjects, as in Sean Lander's paintings, William Wegman's photographs or La Fontaine's fables, they often act as surrogates for humans and we must see ourselves through them, when the moral of the tale is revealed. Obviously in the case of the shrimps this is more complicated: Capron does not imbue them with any humanity and no moral questions are asked. Like the fireworks and the rivers, the shrimp motif takes on the role of intercessor, of a gateway that invites the spectator into the painting; it undoubtedly reassures the viewer and softens the brutal truth: the only subject of these canvases is the painting itself.

The generations of painters who have appeared since the beginning of the 21st century, encouraged by the art market's seemingly unconditional enthusiasm for their work, have never attempted to hide their complete emancipation from the dictates of the history of 20th century painting, or at the very least from any deference to its fundamental characteristics of linearity and evolution. More often than not, these younger generations make no attempt to become part of this history by prolonging it through the usual means, but rather by simply quoting it in a literal and fragmentary way, like the sugary and colorful topping of a desert. With a frank and assumed obsession with Picasso, whose manner of painting a nose or a body or a fragment of a bull's skull, whose principles of deconstruction, can be found over and over again in a kind of never-ending evocation.

Aside from the "Josh Smith coincidence," Capron's painting is not of the same register nor style. Sure, like many others, he has checked out whatever he could find, doing so without having to make much of an effort, thanks to the internet—any artist from the 1970s, who aspired to understand Morandi's painting in order to nourish his own, couldn't possibly have done so by just sitting



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on his butt in front of a screen! It was Morandi, by the way, that I mentioned one day while visiting Hugo Capron's studio, standing before a new canvas, whose colorful palette seemed to me to evoke that of the brilliant Italian. Yes, Capron had recently looked at a book about Morandi, so perhaps it could be said that he had been subconsciously influenced by his palette. His knowledge of art history infuses his practice in rather vague manner: to be more precise, the pictorial solutions employed by certain artists have had more influence on him than the images they have produced or their "iconic" motifs—once again, we are confronted with this overwhelming word, yet that's where we find ourselves, and to practice painting in today's world is to be ready to confront a public that thinks in these terms. Alas and alack, there's nothing iconic in Capron's painting.

I have always thought that the first thing that strikes me about a work of art, particularly a painting, is the way it shows me how its author considers me as a spectator. This is the first thing I notice, perhaps even before I become aware of the subject of the painting or whether it's abstract or figurative. How the painting engages me, the tone of voice in which it speaks to me, the strategies it deploys to interest me, excite my curiosity, to flatter or challenge my tastes... In short, does the painting see me as just another sucker or as someone worthy of entering into a dialog with? Every aspect of the painting makes this clear to me. In most cases, in this little game, you quickly realize that you are being taken for a ride, you recognize the dishonesty, you understand how the artist has chosen the easy path, surfing on current trends, the pretense is plainly obvious.

Capron's painting—I noticed this at first sight—seeks to engage me in a discussion where I feel like a respected and esteemed participant—that doesn't mean that his painting doesn't try to put one over on me in some way or another, but that the relationship established between it and me, appears to be an honorable one. It doesn't rely on the usual trompe-l'oeil and doesn't try to implement the familiar present-day strategies to lend the illusion that such and such a connection is being made: there's no useless chatter, no political engagement, no direct quotation of some great painter or another, no particular subject matter, nothing that has anything to do with quotas, nothing iconic and nothing eco-conscious, no #MeToo or #MePoo.

His painting simply puts its trust in me to understand, as it does itself, the pure and simple language of painting, and to use this language together in our discussion. Thus qualified, we are ready to begin appreciating the painting: whether it depicts shrimps or rivers, it doesn't really matter. What stands out, is an approach to painting, the ambition to "create a canvas" and the frankly absurd yet essential intention of participating in the history of painting, without trying to change the rules of the game.

Eric Troncy



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Eric Troncy is an art critic, exhibition curator and the co-director of Le Consortium art center in Dijon, France.