

## The “ping pong effect”

How can one not admire the incredibly positive energy that flows out of this big courageous man! After all these years, he still struggles in order to escape all forms of “packaging”. Just when we think we “caught” him painting in a particular way, he surprises us with a whole new approach, the boldness of which puts his career at risk every time. This brief intervention is destined to highlight this particular aspect of Chaouki Chamoun’s work.

A sort of “ping pong effect” characterizes the evolution of Chamoun’s art since the very beginning. We are all familiar with his famous landscapes where a group of people occupying the foreground are facing the immensity of nature. These elements are omnipresent in his work, still... Every now and then, he jumps into a totally different dimension. There, human beings as well as the landscape surrounding them (be it wild or urban) are absent from the scene. Each *quantum* leap of this kind gives birth to a new series of paintings we could be tempted to qualify as abstract. Are they really abstract? Why not replace the word *abstract* by the word *representational* or *realistic*? What are these strange brush strokes or paint spots? Why are they diluted sometimes and thick the other times? Do they represent a certain reality? Are they symbolic? Are they the result of a purely impulsive gesture? Actually, all these interpretations are conceivable. However, beyond designations and classifications (almost useless in most of nowadays aesthetic approaches) what really interests me in this process is the process itself. It seems like, in these non-representational paintings, Chamoun’s fascination for great spaces turns into a form of “greed”; as if the majestic mountains, the mysterious breathtaking deserts or the elegantly condescending skyscrapers were not enough. He wants more... so he jumps into the

*unknown*. Still, is this dimension we call *unknown* that far from the artists' *familiar* world? I doubt it. Is the *dripping* technique unknown to him? Is the *arabesque* so far from his near-eastern culture? Is the *pointillism* an art school he never heard of? Of course not, nevertheless, it's the way he lays out these different styles on his huge canvases that creates a rather strange impact on the viewer. This movement of back and forth between what is representational and what is non-representational, between what is heterogeneous and what is pure is what I call the "ping pong effect". This game is indeed risky, but is it a game? Although I have no doubt Chamoun is having a lot of fun doing it, I don't think he sees it as a simple game; It's more like a need. Maybe it's that small man down there, in the very bottom of the painting, who, in search for more space, leaves the ground every time in an almost suicidal attempt to reach something else; something bigger or purer. And maybe this very same man admiring the captivating "landscapes" from above gets dizzy sometimes and decides to fly back to the safer ground...the phantom of Icarus is not far.

Yes it is a game! A very particular kind of game. A game in which you lose only if you fail to *see*, but then again you only fail to *see* if you stop *looking*. Always *looking* and when the *right* moment comes, *seeing* and embodying the vision... come what may! That's a game Chamoun, a great "ping pong" player, masters beautifully.

Rabih Khalil

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