

Tim Maguire

High Fidelity

Fiercely blazing, openly blooming and baroque, Tim Maguire's painting is an exultation of seduction and luxuriance. With the flamboyant playfulness of a well-schooled bad boy, the artist – Tim Maguire was born in 1958 in England, grew up in Australia and lives in London – shamelessly elects the blossom of a tulip as both model and paragon.

The subject means nothing. Tim Maguire is well aware of this and his tulip is no exception. Associating a painter with his subject is a vain task: to consider Cézanne as an eater of (organic) apples, Morandi as collector of (empty) bottles, Domenico Gnoli a tailor of (giant) buttons or Rothko a dauber of (dream-like) colours is clearly an impasse. One can comprehend the interest in choosing a subject that has been so utterly exhausted: the flower devoid of any further pretensions, merits its rehabilitation as a perfect expression of both difference and indifference.

Flower or filter, come to that, little matter, and the artist makes no bones about this. In his Notting Hill studio, alongside canvases currently underway, is

a computer filled with generic images, trees, repertoires of roots, skies, chromatic effects. From this phototheque of « stock-species » -as scientists would say - Tim Maguire undertakes a meticulous, and at first view less than exciting operation that consists, according to a well-known principle, of separating up the inherent tones of cyan, magenta and yellow. The CMY is, as we know, a systemic visual analysis that has, from Seurat to Warhol, and from Chevreul to Walter Benjamin, lent nourishment to a profusion *of work(s) of art in the era of its technical reproductability.*

On the blank canvas, using pigments that are strongly diluted in white spirit, Tim Maguire lays out an initial background of yellow, followed by cyan and then magenta. This processing of tones and values is repeated a number of times, the painting taking shape via coloured waves, gorging itself with layers as thin as pigmented molecules, and gaining definition through an accumulative vaporization. It is a sophisticated creative process, reminiscent of the pictorial tradition of glazing as inaugurated by Van Eyck on a few sparse lime-wood panels, or more recently, of a newspaper photograph- opened by lucky chance at the miscellaneous page - representing a *Crash Machine* silk-screened onto canvas by Andy Warhol.

Profitably confusing painting and photography, art and reproduction, or again the play of appearance and effacement to the point of abstraction, that is to say characteristic elements of post-modernism, Tim Maguire's painting flirts with the palimpsest to a vertiginous degree. It is no doubt this very « ad vertigo » that retains our gaze: glazed flowers, delicately colored membranes, thin-lipped floral cups spread across the whole surface of the canvas. We are, one must admit, a long way from the usual subjects of contemporary art and its penchant for putting childhood, the grotesque, the human-body, derision or again the dissolution of shapes at the heart of its concerns.

Countercurrent, these spring-like flowerings and snowy grains flash-lit in the night, are offered up with a luxuriance of detail and an infinity of graduations.

Far from any naturalistic illusions, this apprehension of the object imposes its artifices via the sugary poison of its very substance. These are images that are perfectly intellectual and sensual, at once aesthetically disturbing and clearly arrested in time. They are vanities, certainly, but in which the elements of prior times, the candle, skull, tempting food-stuffs or velvety fruits, have

disappeared to the advantage of an over-fill of colour, an effacement of volume almost to the point of an optical malaise. Tim Maguire's painting assumes the very essence of a century that has transformed nausea into an alternative form of neurotic wisdom, be it with no little ambivalence. Its insistence on the documentary renders it almost iconic. It flirts with decorative enthusiasm to the point of degenerescence. Even at the very moment of its designation, barely yet revealed, it surrenders up its soul. All seems to dissolve and dilate, self-destructing in the very light of day. We are, one might say, not far from murder, a discreet destruction of the Cezannian motif, committed with the very arms of painting itself : silently, via an intoxication of colours, an overload of effects and optical density.

Ultra-sensitive, Tim Maguire's paintings, with their heightened sense of abundance, bear no seeds of any future degenerescence nor of a lessening of the pictorial flame. On the contrary, time here seems perfectly accorded to a fullness, even if we well know that on the other side of the looking-glass, according to the natural cycle of things, time heralds the lessening of days, the dissipation of the vital sap.

One might hazard an explanation: Tim Maguire's painting is one of *high fidelity* that attains an absolute apotheosis while implying the very impossibility of contentment. Herein lies the ambiguity of the very subject, which is not perhaps a flower after all, nor a landscape, but the exposure of a painted rendering of a fragile Eden on the verge of demise.

At the heart of these *Memento mori*, it is our eye that retains the souvenir of a small bouquet of perfumed petals one day in a friendly garden and makes the link with the shimmering painting before us. Painting, then, as the duplication of sensation and memory ? And painting as an illumination of the metaphor ?

Tim Maguire's paintings marvelously uphold the complicity of nature, form and illusions. Therein lies one constant virtue of his art: it is an ever-renewed treason, silent and limpid.

Laurent Boudier, June-September 2008

Translated from the French by Erin Lawlor.

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