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KALEIDOSCOPE

DORIT MARGREITER

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VATAMANU & TUDOR
PERVERTED MINIMALISM
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BAUDEVIN COINDET DAFFLON DECRAUZAT

LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND

words and photos by LUCA CERIZZA

In Lausanne, unity really is strength: the artists hang out with one another, share studios and run active and constructive nonprofit spaces. Here is a glimpse of this scene shaped by the teachings of Mosset and Armleder, presented through the activity of four of them.

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At least four years must have gone by since the time when, passing through Lausanne, I met Francis Baudevin, Stéphane Dafflon and Philippe Decrauzat in the studio they shared on a small street that ran down to the lake. All products of the unsparing and unconventional teaching of John Armleder at the Cantonal School of Art of Lausanne (ECAL), the three artists were making a name for themselves with a practice that represented a development on a long tradition of Swiss visual art, understood in the broad sense. This is a tradition is rooted in the culture of design and the rationalism of abstract art, extending, with the neo-avant-gardes of the 1960s and then with postmodernism, into an occasionally tongue-in-cheek critique of the history of the original avant-garde movements. A noble family, which has as its rather thoughtful grandfather Max Bill, as very liberal parents Olivier Mosset and Armleder himself, and as rebellious American uncles Jim Isermann, John Tremblay and the late Steven Parrino. To this DNA, Baudevin, Dafflon and Decrauzat (like other Swiss and French artists related to them) added a new pop reflection on the digital image and the possibilities of sampling, on commercial art and on the world of consumption. And they completed the mix with unbridled passion for the sound, icons and mythology of rock, especially post-punk and noise, producing an encounter between the self-absorbed and inexpressive painting made in Switzerland and the most underground American dream.

A few years later, the three have broadened their fields of action and work: they are now teaching at the academy where they once studied, exhibiting on an international scale and are the mainspring of an active local scene. As far as I can tell, the center of this scene seems to be Rue du Simplon, a street which runs parallel to the railroad tracks. At the Café Simplon I meet Stéphane Dafflon, who is on his way to Zürich to set up an exhibition. A few meters further on is the studio that Dafflon shares with Delphine Coindet. Born in France, Coindet moved to Lausanne a few years ago, bringing to this all-male gang her extroverted objectification of postmodern taste. At the house she shares with Philippe Decrauzat, a little bit further down the street, Delphine tells me about her next exhibition in Paris, about her interest in the sculpture (certainly more rooted in Pop than in Arte Povera) of Piero Gilardi and Pino Pascali, about the difficulty she has in reconstructing a history of the avant-garde from a female perspective and about the approach she takes to the planning and production of her work.

After crossing the road on which Delphine lives, Rue de Simplon changes its name. Here, right alongside the railroad tracks, I come across a large industrial building. If it were not for the presence of the "Lausanne" sign of the Swiss railroads, for a moment I might have thought I was somewhere on New York's Lower East Side. Located next-door to a Chinese takeaway, this space is divided between Baudevin and Decrauzat's studio and the nonprofit organization Circuit, which the two of them have been running for ten years as part of an artists' collective and which they transferred to the building four years ago. Along with the more recent 1m3, a space that holds exhibitions and produces publications, run by the artists Benjamin Valenza and Adrien Missika, the designer Stéphane Barbier-Bouvet and the curator Jeanne Graff, Circuit is to some extent the heart of this scene. It hosts exhibitions by young local artists as well as cult figures, from Steven Parrino to Alessandro Mendini, stages musical performances, and produces and sells CDs, beautiful vinyl records (often embellished with Baudevin and Decrauzat's artwork), artist's editions and books.

Passing through a door, I find myself in the studio, amidst a riot of CDs, vinyl records, blank canvases, color tests, canvases decorated with abstract patterns, abstract patterns ready to be transferred onto the blank canvases and some reference books. When speaking of the painting found there, you have to imagine something that does not exist solely in two dimensions, but extends out into space in the form of objects that play around with the conventions of poster art and industrial graphics (Baudevin) or with dynamic optical patterns (Decrauzat). Despite the paint on Decrauzat's black shoes and on the studio floor, the motivation behind these paintings couldn't be further from romantic and violently expressive yearnings. The attitude toward painting shown by Decrauzat, Baudevin and Dafflon is the detached and ironic posture that their cultural tradition has always adopted: an amused critique of the mythology of expression, a clinical negation of "inner necessity" and a rejection of the heroic myth of the artist. Their idea of painting is rather the one summed up by the t-shirt that Baudevin is wearing on the day we meet—two straight lines, yellow on a brown ground, representing paint dripping from what looks like a monochrome.

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