

BRANDING YOU CAN TRUST

Heidi Wood / Notre Dame de Moustoire Chapel

Notre-Dame de Moustoire is a chapel. Its presence in the depths of the countryside is indicated to visitors by a sign. On it, a chapel is simplified, reduced to a symbol, an image, a logo: chapel this way!

We wonder how the “chapel” logo influences our first impressions of Notre-Dame de Moustoire. Although it is similar to all the others, this chapel is unique within its category. Its selling point as a tourist attraction is precisely its difference: its architectural particularities, the specific way it sits in the landscape. Yet the logo reduces it to a chapel like the rest, one among many, one that when added to all the others constitutes “heritage”. This is what the sign says. More than indicating the chapel itself, it states its contribution to the region’s appeal to tourists.

In this way, codes standardize the world. They brand it. Here, it is a brand you can trust, have faith in. Clearly there is something here that shouldn’t be missed. The schematized logo claims to be universal. It signals a chapel worthy of interest for all passers-by, regardless of religious convictions. The cultural nature of the site would seem to have been sidestepped. Under the cover of directing us or facilitating comprehension, codes govern reality. We cannot imagine the extent to which they orient the way we see. By appearing prior to the thing we will see, the logo reduces it. By foreshadowing, it deforms. How does Notre-Dame de Moustoire chapel correspond to our expectations of chapels? Why does its appeal to tourists deserve to be proclaimed? By schematizing the world, our very apprehension of that world is simplified.

Heidi Wood focuses on the arbitrary dimension of the code that governs reality to the point of replacing it. Invited to exhibit in this chapel, she chose to play with the relationship of meaning between indicator and indicated. Using fiction as an alibi, she reshuffles the representations that connect signs to objects. Has she made the “chapel” logo into a new icon to worship?

The piece she presents indicates that something has been shifted. Three hanging chasubles block the nave at regular intervals. Carefully crafted, playing on the contrast between the different fabrics used, these sumptuous gowns directly echo ceremonial dress. The cross-stitched embroidery recreates the logo from the road sign outside. The symbolism of the colors plays on other conventions, such as male and female.

A schematic evocation of three absent bodies, the three chasubles fill the space with a strong physical presence. The floating nature of the gowns as well as the contrast between the warm, luminous materiality of the fabrics and the cold, mineral, lackluster context, all participate in a generally disturbing sense of artificial remanence.

The born again aspect of this fake ceremony provokes a vague feeling that these muddled categories are not inappropriate here.

Philippe Coubetergues

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(translated from French)