

HEIDI WOOD

PRODUCTION SITE, Le 116, Montreuil

March 7 – May 30 2015

Let's take a walk in the Woods. We pass through forests of symbols with no mixed messages. Quite the contrary, everything is there, spread over the walls and even the floor. We won't get lost. The exhibition "Production Site" takes us to Le 116, Montreuil's art center, to see the buildings that inhabit Montreuil but in a different way: as wall paintings that look like giant stickers in primary colors. Outside has come inside. The city is reduced to its signage, to a group of signs and pictograms that erase experience, or to be exact, cover it up. The forms are minimal, essential. They are the means by which Heidi Wood mimes an art that supposedly sprinkles wellbeing, by "redeeming" or "transcending" reality, allowing visitors to see their everyday life differently. More biodynamic, more vibrant, in lemon yellow and tomato red. But at the same time, the artist's work is also kept at a distance because the urban landscape appears as a group of signs that refer back only to themselves.

In fact, Heidi Wood's work, even if it uses artifacts to which we can legitimately apply categories of judgment and taste and find sensorial pleasure in, is also conceptual. With "Production Site", the artist consciously fulfills a well-known contract: public money (modestly) finances a commission as long as it meets criteria of "casting a positive light", encouraging "social cohesion" and focusing on the "local", particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods. ***"I embody these clichés to play the role of the official artist," says Wood. "I'm trying to draw attention to the fact that if they are prerequisites for financing and exhibiting art, they will hamper diversity and reduce ambitions."***

The most striking example of this reduction would seem to be the series of souvenir plates, like collectors' items of yesteryear, that are presented under glass in the second room. The expected picturesque kitsch has been replaced by images of high voltage electrical towers in a minimal impressionist style. Except that in truth, there is no irony here. More an echo of the bemoaning (and hope) of the writer Céline in *Death on the Installment Plan*: ***"The day they remove the hook-shaped lamp post from the corner by Number 12, I'll be very sad. Man is temporary, I know that, but we've already temporized enough for my money. (...) Things seem pretty crummy, but if they could carry us away with them, we'd die of poetry."***

This effort to put intimacy back into manufactured objects is inscribed in a project begun in 2010 in Chevilly-Larue called "Winter Vacation". At the time, Heidi Wood asked residents to bring personal objects for her to draw and used the images made of them on pencil cases, posters and various gadgets sold at the Christmas market. Without finding many customers. We are so "deprived of the world", to use the expression of philosopher Franck Fischbach, that the objects with which we live no longer look to us like the world. They become squalid, unworthy of being loved.

So the urban landscape Heidi Wood paints at Le 116 is not a joke. It is parody but in the literal sense, to be sung next to the ode in a well-known tune. It highlights given that re-enchanting is out of the question. The artist works from photographs, analyses, sorts through, "filters out", she says, until she obtains "generic" forms that do not necessarily correspond to real buildings but rather to a residential setting as a whole. In Montreuil, those she notices from recent times are the modern high-rise, the contemporary and the industrial. Among other things, Wood offers studies of facades in which she indicates an opposition between an organization based on "grid" and "anti-grid". An example of the latter, in the last decade, is the random distribution of windows onto interweavings of color. Because these studies are painted on upholstery fabric, the facade is decoration on two levels: as surface but also as transformation. Heidi Wood says that her paintings are destroyed if they are not bought within five years. This is coherent with the contrary strategy visitors can see at Le 116 of an ever-changing exhibition. The artist develops her wall paintings day after day, adds her "generic" buildings and changes them into engines, as if form necessarily produced form.

This is one of the meanings of “Production Site”: a factory of forms. Montreuil goes in one end, through the eye, through the photo, and continuously, throughout the exhibition, comes out the other as a painting. Even better, the artist is on-site. She has set up her studio in the middle, in the passageway between the two main exhibition spaces in Le 116. She works there during opening hours, or at other times, it depends. As “*a social worker for the municipality of Montreuil*”, Wood legitimately wonders what this situation changes in her work, what she produces on top of a series of artifacts or a performance. A presence? Interaction?

If it is clear that art does not fix anything, does not improve anyone’s social condition, perhaps it can at least be driven by a vital principle as a gesture, an impulse, to make itself shareable. What is shared here, more than the artwork is the work that goes into it. With Heidi Wood, we are a long way from the “participative” art of the 1990’s. Visitors do not play with elements to be “activated” or “reactivated”. They arrive at a production site where what is produced (or displayed) is the production itself and they see that the artist is a factory worker like any other.

Eric Loret

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