

JUILLET-AOÛT 2013



05 **Éditorial 55^e Biennale de Venise : de l'imaginaire contemporain et des fantômes** Ghosts and resuscitation in Venice Anaël Pigeat

08 **Panamarenko et son biotope** Raymond Balau

12 **EXPOSITIONS/REVIEWS**

12 Michelangelo Antonioni 14 Des gestes de la pensée 16 La dernière vague
18 Moving Norman Foster on Art ; Fabrice Gygi 20 Let's Talk About Painting (Again)
22 Keith Haring 24 Michelangelo Pistoletto 26 Salon de Montrouge 28 Paul Wallach
32 Joana Hadjithomas et Khalil Joreige ; David Douard 34 André Morain

36 **James Turrell dans le volcan**

James Turrell In the Volcano. François Jonquet

43 **Ange Leccia expérimental romantique**

Ange Leccia Romantic Experimentalist. Anaël Pigeat

48 **Abidjan-chantiers topographie d'une scène transafricaine**

Abidjan, an Art Scene under Construction. Franck Hermann Ekra

INTRODUCING

54 **Isabelle Giovacchini** Anaël Pigeat

57 **Simon Hantaï sur la scène internationale**

Simon Hantaï and the International Scene. Paul Rodgers

63 **Peinture et philosophie : les aventures de la vérité**

The Philosopher Curates interview de Bernard-Henri Lévy par Catherine Millet

73 **Philippe Caubère la Comédie humaine d'un comédien**

LIVRES

80 **Alain Fleischer Sade en images** interview par Jacques Henric

83 Casanova histoires de sa vie 84 Blaise Cendrars ou le monde et moi
86 La traduction de l'indicible 88 Alain Badiou l'entracte et l'intervalle
89 Une enfance dans la guerre d'Algérie
92 Tu étais juif, Ulysse Le feuilletton Jacques Henric

RUBRIQUES / BACK

93 **Beat Generation** interview de Jean-Jacques Lebel par Léa Bismuth

96 **V. Baudrillard et H. Archambault dix ans en Avignon** Georges Banu

98 **La photographie** Dominique Baqué

102 **Calendrier**

Les bonus

Jacques Henric « Faire la vie » (Extraits)
Pascal Boulanger Au commencement des douleurs
Olivier Renault Montparnasse, lieux de légende

et aussi

L'Ange de l'histoire Palais des beaux-arts, Paris
Pierre Ardouvin Crac, Sète
Susan Hiller Synagogue, Delme

Simon Hantai and the International Scene

When we were working on the Simon Hantai supplement published with *art press* 401, in connection with the major retrospective at the Pompidou Center (to September 2), Paul Rodgers, a longstanding champion of Hantai's work in the U.S., sent us this very personal text which we are happy to publish here as a prolongation of our homage to the painter.



I moved to Paris at the end of 1974, once I was through with my undergraduate studies. In Paris, it took me a little while to get oriented and, ironically, I missed the Simon Hantai retrospective at the French Museum of Modern Art when it was up on Ave. President Wilson, before Beaubourg was built. That was 1976. To tell the truth, I walked by the entrance of the museum, but the name of "Hantai" seemed strange and alien. I didn't know what it signified and whatever

was the price of entrance, maybe ten francs at the time, it was dissuasive. That would have been my evening meal. It was shortly after, that I walked into the Jean Fournier Gallery and found myself confronted by an installation of Hantai paintings. Commercial art galleries are good that way, for young people, they're free! It was a revelation. I distinctly remember saying to myself: "Wow! So modern art is still being made today!" I learnt

the lesson that day: modern art is contemporary. Sometime later, Jean Fournier introduced me to Simon Hantai at another artist's opening and Simon invited me to come to his house. I was launched!

In 1980 I moved to New York. That was closely related to my relationship with Simon. I would have gone to New York anyway. I was intrigued by the history of modern art, of modern culture. Paris-New York. We now understand that this was only a half truth, but a valid half-truth none-the-less. At that point, the issue for me was, why is the contemporary international art world indifferent to the work of a great modern artist, who is the legitimate descendant of recent American painting? By American painting, I mean Newman, Pollock, Rothko, among others. It should be stated that, at the outset, going back now to the mid-50s and early 60s, for Hantai, it was Pollock who was the point of engagement. But the broader question was, as I frame it: why did Hantai seem to count for so little on the international scene, at that time, the mid-1970s, given that he was addressing Pollock in a manner that no contemporary art had managed? I think at this point in my life, I know the answer to this question, but it is many-faceted. I didn't understand it then. All I can say is that I set myself the task of making the aesthetic case for Simon Hantai's art on the international scene and, as I came to realize over time, the case for modern art in the second half of the twentieth century. You can say I'm crazy!

ABSTRACT WARHOL

What the hell was I doing? Looking back now, it feels hallucinogenic. But I can assure you, it was real! Hallucinations of the "real"! There were some Hantai paintings in the United States. Hirschhorn in Washington and Knox in Buffalo had bought them. Around the time of my arrival in New York, Bill Rubin bought a large format painting for the Museum of Modern Art from Pierre Matisse, who had done a couple of shows in the 1970s. This painting was

shown in New York's MoMA last year with great popular success. But there was no real engagement when Rubin bought it. Nothing answered why New York, which had produced Newman, Pollock, Rothko, would be so indifferent to Hantaï.

I brought paintings across the Atlantic, first in the mid 1980s, and then exhibited them in my gallery space, which at that point was private, from 1997 on. It was so interesting! I would invite people to see them. Smart people, critics, people really clued in, would say to me that it looked kind of like Warhol, in that you couldn't see how the

image transferred to the canvas. They were right, of course. Look at an Hantaï painting. You can't get that line from mind-eye to hand co-ordination. Was it some kind of photographic process, like Warhol's silk-screening? I was surprised and so I had to think about it. I also asked Hantaï. He was not at all surprised. He stated that he always thought Warhol was on to something. Warhol, as we know, used the industrial process of silk-screening to separate himself from the old idea that art, somehow, expressed the artist's personal experience. Hantaï said that this idea was

also central to his invention of the 'folding method'. Hantaï understood, as well as did Warhol, that in a society of mass population, living on the output of the industrial process, such a notion was an anachronistic conceit. He felt that Warhol was trying to deal with some of the same issues as he had been and that this connected Warhol to Pollock.

At the same time, Hantaï understood that art is a vehicle of human meaning, human content. If we adopt the terminology of modern psychoanalysis, we will say a 'subject'. I think that the major figures of American art in the 1960s, who were Hantaï's contemporaries, were resistant to that. I'm thinking of Warhol, but also of Frank Stella and Donald Judd, and others back in Europe who were paying attention to American art, Yves Klein and Richter for example. When Hantaï invented his 'folding method' in 1960, he was addressing the same issues they were, only he was doing it from the position of a 'modern subject'. When I did my exhibition *Simon Hantaï: Not For Sale in New York* in 2010, I wrote a catalogue essay dealing with the relationship between Hantaï and Warhol. Warhol said somewhere that he knew abstract art was the great art of his time, only he couldn't do it. I have always thought this candid admission on Warhol's part showed great courage and integrity. It can be said that Hantaï is the 'abstract Warhol'. It's important to bear in mind, of course, that we are not talking about influence here. Hantaï's folding method predates the first silk-screens. All these artists were working more or less contemporaneously with the issues of art at the time.

MODERN ART AND MODERNISM

I think you have to understand that the well of modern art was poisoned by the late 1950s and certainly going into the 60s. It was poisoned by Clement Greenberg and by "Modernism." Today the terms "modern art" and "modernism" are used interchangeably. I think this is completely misleading. "Modernism" is a label which seeks to turn modern art into a style. Modern art is not a style. It is a tradition of great art extending over two hundred years, engaged with modern literature and philosophy and much else. 'Modernism' is a simplistic and mistaken criticism which sought to make modern art comprehensible to contemporary, notably American,



Page de gauche/page left: « Meun », 1967. Huile sur toile, 220 x 221 cm (Collection privée ; Court, Paul Rodgers / 9W, New York). Oil on canvas
Ci-contre/left: Simon Hantaï, (Ph. Édouard Boubat)

viewers. When you read the accounts of the 1950s, you realize that the great American artists then, de Kooning, Pollock, Rothko, Newman, and others, completely rejected Greenberg's account of their work. Greenberg, one by one, turned against them too. I think he said to himself that if they didn't endorse his critical viewpoint, then he would turn his attention to a new generation of artists who would accept his guidance. So he anointed another movement, Color Field. But Color Field bombed out and I don't think it is ever coming back. The failure of Color Field was used to discredit modern art from the 1960s on.

In a further twist, major historical figures of the period such as Stella, Judd and others, thought that Greenberg would champion them as extensions of his "modernist" theories. But he didn't. He did the opposite and rejected them. I think that was a moment of trauma for those artists. They realized that they had been orphaned by the influential critic and that, if they did not fight back, they would never gain attention. I think this accounts for the extraordinarily polemical edge to art in New York during the 60s, during the *Artforum* era. As it fell out, Greenberg's position was overthrown. I remember when I met him, he was declaring that he was "on strike"!

It's worth taking a look at Greenberg's standing now. It contains a contradiction. On the one hand, he is held to be the most significant and influential critic of his generation and his name is linked with Pollock and Newman and Rothko, who are then taken to be "modernist" artists. On the other, he is rejected. So, by implication, those artists are too. And yet Greenberg's insistence on vision and formal innovation has been carried over into the minimalist preoccupation with "specific objects." The post-war American art world was taking shape with all this. It was not an art world that was concerned with modern art, which was international and grounded in quite different aesthetic and intellectual issues. It was a national American school of art objects, lending itself to the real preoccupations of the period which were commercial. Objects can be bought and sold.

I think a crucial moment for Hantaï arrived with his exhibition at Emmerich's, in New York, in 1982. I saw it. It was a beautiful exhibition but the context was all wrong. Andre Emmerich was a charming and distinguished art dealer, but he was associated with Color Field. When Hantaï showed there at that time, he came across to American viewers, who did not know his concerns, as a European extension of Color Field, a latter-day 'modernist'. I say he came across, but actually he didn't. Ameri-

can viewers did not know what to make of him. They sensed it was not Color Field, but they didn't know what it was. The exhibition got very little play, which was maybe just as well. Hantaï realized his tactical error in having allowed this exhibition to happen. It's worth noting that he did not come to New York for it. It's also instructive to remark that in the biographical notes for his exhibition at the Munster museum, Germany, in 1999, there is no mention of the Emmerich exhibition. Hantaï personally oversaw the material for that catalogue. It is not an accident if the Emmerich exhibition is not mentioned. His decision shortly after, to cease all commercial exhibition of his work, begins to take shape with this Emmerich exhibition. I know all this because I was sitting at the table throughout. The same year he exhibited at the CAPC, in Bordeaux, and the year after at the Venice Biennale, as the French entrant, and also at his French gallery Jean Fournier, in Paris. Then he makes the break. So why was it hard to introduce Hantaï in America? Because he was absent from the commercial circuit. But also, because his work rejected 'modernism' and engaged the history of modern art.

AN INTELLECTUAL AND AESTHETIC PURSUIT

A less significant artist would never have survived the self-imposed neglect that his decision entailed. We have to remember that the early 1980s ushered in a new, brash, exclusively commercial, sensibility into contemporary art. Hantaï did not want to be sucked into that. Hantaï did not have anything against the buying and selling of art. He did think, however, that this should be secondary. He felt that art should be an intellectual and aesthetic pursuit first and be appreciated as such. Once that was in place, then sale of his work was fine with him. You know, this debate is going on in the art world right now. More and more people are stepping forward to complain that aesthetic value has been compromised by commercialization. Take Dave Hickey's recent stand, for example. He has said that he won't collude any more with this contemporary art world. Hantaï was a pioneer of such a view. Dave will be treated as a crazy man, just as Hantaï was. However, they are not the crazy ones. They have integrity. All this leads into a sociological mode of thinking. It's of secondary importance. The important issue is that Hantaï withdrew from the art world after 1983 because, fundamentally, he understood that the critical context, this confusion of modern art with "modernism," and further the abandonment of modern art for a

new aesthetic of "contemporary" art, made it impossible for people to see his work as he saw it. He decided to put his trust in posterity.

But the damage was done and even after thirty years he has not been able to extricate himself entirely from the false "modernist" context. We see this with recent events. In 2010, Hantaï was again shown in an American gallery, this time Paul Kasmin's. Kasmin's father was the London associate of Andre Emmerich and showcased the Color Field painters. His son has continued this tendency, although the gallery has also embraced Pop. So we are still caught in the same circuit. In the catalogue for this exhibition, the young art historian Molly Warnock, herself trained in the "modernist" school of art history, calls Hantaï a "modernist" painter. This is totally wrong. I felt I could not let this go. Hantaï would never have approved. So I wrote a letter which was published in *Art in America* stating clearly for the record that Hantaï is not a "modernist" painter. He is a "modern" painter. I say it again here. This is an entirely false context for his work. I say this without any disrespect for Paul Kasmin who is running a successful contemporary, commercial gallery. Good luck to him! But this would never have happened while Hantaï was alive. Now he is gone, it is happening.

The Pompidou Center retrospective will not tour. I'm still asking the same question that I did in 1980. How is this possible, for a great international modern artist of the second half of the twentieth century? I have asked this question recently in an open letter to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which is also published on my website for anyone to read. I specifically raise the issue of Hantaï's relationship with Picasso. We all know that the Museum of Modern Art bases its account on Picasso and Cubism. Well, I point out that the invention of Hantaï's 'folding method' is linked to Cubism and, specifically, to Picasso's famous metal sculpture, *The Guitar*. Cubism and *The Guitar* are always seen as founding a tradition of "assemblage" in twentieth century art. But I point out that Picasso began to make *The Guitar* by folding. Was Hantaï thinking of Picasso when he invented the "folding method" in 1960? There is significant documentary evidence to confirm that he was. My point is simply that if Hantaï is engaged with Picasso in this manner, then should he not be a major concern of the Museum of Modern Art? Shouldn't the Museum of Modern Art organize a retrospective of Simon Hantaï and give him his place in the history of modern art? I raise the question. ■