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JACQUES PERCONTE,

THE DIGITAL IMAGE, AND THE SUBLIME

French artist Jacques Perconte initiated in 2003 a series of digital "films" that explore the landscape, and above all its image; the series will its sixth offspring this year, "Impressions de", a reference and reverence to the Impressionists, for his aesthetic has always been—incidentally—compared by critics to their own. How could it not be?



uaonen (2003)

Indeed, through a meticulous and craftsmanlike work of multiple compressions, collages and superimpositions, Jacques Perconte tells the story of the structural and vibrating pixelation that gives a new formal expression to every single change of light and wind, which, among others, gently animate his video landscapes.

As the Impressionists once used short and broken brush strokes of unmixed colors to translate in plastic terms the light and heat that shaped in time that one landscape, Jacques Perconte uses the very imperfections or aberrations—one might say in an era that praises for higher and higher definition—of his images that he subjected to a

tremendous loss of data. "A bug isn't a mistake for the program, it shouldn't be one for me", he says.

At the source of every film of the series is a fortunate promenade, for the artist travels often with a camera at hand, like the Impressionists with their paint tubes and easels. For *Impressions de* (2010), Jacques Perconte is currently collecting images in Normandy, while going on a pilgrimage that follows the late nineteenth century painters' trail. All the other films — *uaonen* (2003), *uisheset* (2007), *Pauillac-Margaux* (2008), *Le passage* (2009), and *Après le feu* (2010)—were shot while in transit, from the window of a train, a car, or even while sailing. Whatever special and romantic connection Jacques Perconte may have with the nature unfolding before his eyes at the moment of recording, the digital narrative behind the moving landscape unveils itself back in his studio, day after day, compression after compression, aberration after aberration, layer after layer, until the artist's instinct and sensibility tell him it's there. What's there?

"The scenarios of my films are dictated by the geography of the landscapes, as well as the story that unfolds during their perception. In a way, they are promenades. The narration settles in the transformations the image suffers. First and a priori naturalist, it emphasizes the landscape, its plasticity, and then it becomes less objective, maybe more impressionist.

Light draws, color magnifies, matter prevails, and finally the landscape slowly becomes abstract. Familiar at first, it becomes an expressive and mental space." (Jacques Perconte)

Thus, in each of his films the narrative is the story of a whimsical and progressive shift from the initial impression of the landscape the artist once contemplated through his viewfinder to its digital expression on the computer screen through bursts of colorful and swarming pixels; from the flat surface and appearance of a video image to the organic and plastic richness that is hidden behind the thin veil of high-definition; from Naturalism to Impressionism, and even to some extent Fauvism if we shall pursue this game of incidental comparisons; from the original perception and recording to the infinitely imaginary the picture may therefore convey through the spectators' eyes. "We no longer see the image of the landscape, we see the landscape of the image", the artist says.

The progressive abstraction of the image within itself after the systematic exposure of its original and natural referent, a real landscape that gave birth to each film of the series, is in fact what allows the very image to be a mental space: slowly loosing its grip on reality, the motion picture becomes a landscape of its own and its narrative, even though it imposes itself



Après le feu
(2010)



Le passage
(2009)

uished
(200?)

magnificently, is neither dictatorial nor conceptual, nor even overly technical (contrary to its long and drawn-out production). It is only natural for the viewer to extend Jacques Perconte's films with his/her own memory and imagination, since they don't pretend to do anything but cradle our sensibility, maybe our sense of Beauty. To some extent, the experience is close to listening to music. *Flânerie* may be the only watchword.

With *Après le feu* (2010), which originated during a trip in Corsica 'after a wildfire', Jacques Perconte has opened a new symbolic dimension to his landscapes. As we saw earlier, the artist works and experiments in communion with the hazardous results that the programs of data compression he uses may render. For his last film, while carefully collecting and combining during the process waves of bugs or aberrations in his images, he managed to create the illusion of a depth in his scenery that simply didn't exist in the

original Corsican landscape. On screen, to a valley seemingly following the course of the train, from the back of which the artist stood to record images, progressively succeeds a tremendous, vertiginous, pixilated, and vivid gap under the tracks. In other words, while slowly turning its focus from the outward to the inward, from the perceived landscape to its digital expression, the image literally and radically rewrote its natural topography to tell an entirely new story. Yet and to top it all, from the beginning to the end, the film never completely ceases to depict nature for all the alienating pixels remain connected to what was once the shimmering light hitting the leaves of a tree. Nonsense?

The magic tricks of Jacques Perconte caused the image of *Après le feu* not only to go free, dethroning Mother Nature for the Grotesque, but also to go mad! During the process, it has gained a soul and it is willing to reinterpret drastically our

perceptions against our senses—the empirical experience of the outside—while throwing us in its infinite and inexhaustible variable body. It takes us on a fantastic ride to inspire in us an overwhelming sense of the Sublime. If Jacques Perconte's series of sceneries may be close to the aesthetic of the Impressionists, incidentally his landscapes could not be more Romantic, for their Beauty always remains "connected to the form of the object", which is actually represented by a "boundlessness" (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 1790). Jacques Perconte somehow managed to reconcile the Beauty with the Sublime in his digital flâneries against the current ideal and understanding of high-defined perfection. Far again from being received as cold, conceptual and overly technical, his digital abstractions vibrate, feel and provoke us.

BY VIOLANNE BOUTET DE MONVEL

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