

Players

February 22–April 22, 2018

Looking and Playing in Space¹

On the one hand, Serge Murphy is a resolutely multidisciplinary artist, as firmly established² as he is restlessly dexterous, unclassifiable and yet almost universally recognized for over forty years now, moreover a poet (like Guido), a generous teacher, and a versatile actor in the art milieu. On the other hand, Jean-François Lauda is a young abstract painter, unassuming but often considered to be one of the most promising of his generation, a noise musician in his spare time, decidedly self-taught (like Guido) but also the son, grandson and great-grandson of painters.

When discussing the decades-long, unwavering continuity of his “cobbled-together inventions,” Murphy replies with a smile: “It’s as though I’ve only ever had one material idea in my ‘career’ for manifesting my relationship to art, for inscribing what touches me and what resembles me in its history, for speaking about time and sculpture. . .” I remember that at the opening for his most recent exhibition at the MMFA, the artist read an excerpt from a poem by Roland Giguère: “On a thin and fragile stage stands the sum of our constructions, all convoluted and lofty, finely chiseled lifelines, scaffolding for impossible tomorrows, castles of quicksand, etc.” It is well known that the old surrealist painter, indifferent to any trend or countertrend, had ploughed *his own furrow* for over half a century.

¹ The title comes from a collection of poems by Saint-Denys-Garneau, which Serge Murphy treasures in an extremely rare, first-edition copy of the book.

² In 1977, he received a master’s degree in aesthetics from the University of Paris 8.

I wonder whether the best way to approach Murphy’s modular works, in this case *Le carnaval de tous les jours* [Carnival of the Everyday] and *Le monde plate-forme* [Platform World], is not inextricably linked therefore to reading poetry, given all the attention we must give to silence between the constructions, to metamorphoses that involve the most trivial elements, like ordinary words in poems, and also to the double articulation of the iconography, as much within each module as between one module and the next. We should bear in mind that the artist’s first poetry collection, published by Hexagone in 2010, is suggestively called *La vie quotidienne est éternelle* [Everyday Life Is Eternal].

From Murphy to Lauda, we move from sculpture to painting, yet not without a sense of continuity. At the time this text was written, the painter was planning to exhibit a mosaic of small watercolours in the form of a spatialized book, which would use various tones to address the materials of abstract painting today, echoing Murphy’s propositions on sculpture practices. Here again, a fortuitous dialectic between the fragment and the monumental would exist. Murphy clearly chose his acolyte because of the many affinities between them. He recently wrote that “for Lauda, the canvas is a laboratory, a place for painting, a surface over which a field of experimentation unfolds. Each painting presents a multitude of superimposed surfaces, in which forms stand together in a kind of intuitive dance.”

Like him, Lauda constantly revisits his works, which become palimpsests of a distinctly low-tech style—alternating between all kinds of areas, sometimes with a certain brutality and other times with unexpected refinement—which periodically reconciles the work’s past and present, background and form, as well as drawing and painting.

In the already highly charged, large found object that is Molinari's last studio, in which some of his paintings will likely be hung, Murphy's and Lauda's works appear to play with each other in complete freedom and collaboration, as though they were all, each in their own way, in search of lost time.

— Gilles Daigneault

The creation residencies at the Guido Molinari Foundation are gradually becoming a tradition. This winter, we passed the torch to Serge Murphy and Jean-François Lauda. An accomplished artist, Murphy is known particularly for his sculpture and installation practice. An emerging artist, Lauda uses painting as the best means for expressing his originality, while also making reference to those who previously revolutionized the discipline. These two "players" have transformed the atmosphere of the Foundation. The place has become a dynamic and inhabited workshop: a laboratory, a work in progress, a playing field.

In this regard, the chosen title is not insignificant. To play means to experiment, dare, make and remake, hesitate and continue, call into question. Sometimes, the game is subtle, like the word "avant-garde" half-hidden behind the cardboard of the installation *Ruine achevée*. Art critics and historians will recognize the work's clever winking at their efforts to analyze, interpret and, ultimately, classify when faced with such a disparate approach. Elsewhere, the pages of a diary filled with watercolours reveal traces of a prior game. The seventy-two studies summarize Lauda's pictorial vocabulary: each page shows vestiges of the "isms" that marked the first half of the twentieth century. We can follow the painter as he oscillates between the black monochrome and the irresistible urge to shatter it by inserting an unexpected element.

The game's playing field seems infinite, and the rules (if any exist) have been invented by the players themselves. It is now the visitor's turn to roll the dice and discover how to come out winning.

— Margarida Mafra