

## PATRICIA FALGUIÈRES Childhood and History

Adam Adach's painting addresses this "poverty of experience" which Walter Benjamin had shown to be a characteristic of the condition of modern man after World War I, as early as 1933. "Impoverishment of experience" meant that the catastrophe of modern war, this industrial and scientific war that agglomerated individual destinies in a shapeless mass, invalidated all speech, all singular narrative that would have transmitted whatever could have been called "experience": "a whole generation, who had gone to school by horse-drawn tramways, found itself standing under the sky in a landscape where everything had changed - except the clouds and, in the center, in a field of destructive forces and explosions, the fragile, tiny human body". Fathers returned mute from battlefields, "not richer, but poorer in communicable experiences".

What had disappeared was the possibility of narrative: the fact that there is something to report about an experience, that is worth it, and that it will be transmitted as a precious inheritance because one has received it. For instance, a proverb, or the last words of a dying man, a fable or a travel narrative are all forms of our inheritance. The figures of annihilation proposed by the twentieth century have utterly destroyed all pretence of transmitting inherited experience (a singular knowledge acquired by and through hardship) as well as that experience's authority. The obsolescence of "these forms where experience poses as authority" – maxims and proverbs - signals this unprecedented expropriation of the subject which the newspaper reading or television news bring back to us each day. To quote Giorgio Agamben, "Today, nobody seems to hold enough authority anymore to guarantee experience".

History is Adam Adach's material, the history and the silence of images that have escaped disaster, gathered randomly by the artist in flea markets and albums, familiar or anonymous. Adach's painting contests a totally different experience of silence with the silence of fathers and unspeakable catastrophes that took place: a muteness that precedes speech.

While so many artists coming from the former communist empire satisfy themselves with an immediately negotiable imagery for the Neo-Pop market. Adach intervenes at the meeting point of the emergence of signs - of what history will have identified as signs. The half swastikas of irredeemable poles in 1938 (*Minderheit*), the spherical dome of the tsarist Warsaw fortress where, long before socialist dissidents, the first socialists were incarcerated (*Citadel*), or the enigmatic troop of women holding pickaxes and shovels in a winter landscape (*Prussia*) that evoke the twentieth century Soviet imagery as well as nineteenth century painting, but whose title refers us to 1912 Prussia: all these paintings have the particularity of inviting the signs and images of "before", before they were fixated in signs and images, before events gave them meaning.

The signs that they deliver are literally ambivalent. It is their historic destiny that permeates this ambiguity in which all true painting exceeds the readability of images. Even when the painting seems to escape history (*1909 Curiosity [Berlin]*), it sends us back to a déjà-vu (as a matter of fact, the Hollywood imagery of Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch*), proposing a paradoxical genealogy. Images that are oddly undatable, that are "timeless", that allow us to imagine going back in time: the work of the painter consists in going back to a point of uncertainty where another reading of signs, another story, could have been possible. This is the utopian dimension of Adach's work. This "before", these "landscapes with figures" unveil a fantastical economy.

Their spatiality, the distribution and the height of the "tiny and fragile bodies" of people scattered across the painting, the gradual introduction of anecdotes along a web of wefts and hiding places that obstructs the eye, or the inscription of an image in the transparency of texture: the complexity of the route offered to us, as well as the surprises - the reversals - are laid out and rendered for us. While Nature opens up like a welcoming glade, like a "blank" in history, like the ideal abandonment - or innocence - of childhood. FKK Alliance which presents the discreet

nudity of asexual characters rooted in an idyllic glade reminds us of the nature associations founded at the beginning of the twentieth century in Germany that later became the strongholds of Nazism: actually, the formal and the scale of the painting glue the spectator's nose upon a wall of paint before, at second view and at a good distance, he may already identify it as a landscape. This is the "Whiteness" of history, like the white sign that welcomes the visitor to the dense pine forest (Treblinka), or like the birch trees (*Birken*) that gave their name to Birkenau. The brush strokes catch signs before they designate an object, before they take meaning, at the indistinctive point where language appears: Adam Adach sends us back to our childhood - when the experience of signs is mixed up with life itself. If so many painters try to reactivate the emblems of history, endorse or parody devaluated heraldry, Adach's position is singular: a notch below, when history is not yet played out, when signs have not yet been constituted. The repainted image is thus an efficient form of knowledge, a true experience of history and a sort of therapy: where we replay the learning of signs as if in a dream.

*Visa de censure (Horizon perdu)* presents the active power of this dream-like leaning: an ideal palace of disturbing size (fascist architecture), whose monumental frontality reassures and threatens like in a dream. On the edge of an ornamental pond a couple is discussing: the luminous halo that isolates them reminds us of a movie set, the agitated waves show the brush work. A primitive scene that has been tampered with, a space for fantasy, in more than one respect: in the biggest pre-war Hollywood success (*Lost Horizon*) whose projection in the Reich was however forbidden by the Nazis, Shangri-La is the imaginary realm of the "good despot". From the imagery and the desire invested in it, there is unexpected knowledge to be extracted, of which painting, if it knows how to undo the image, is the experience.

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