

THE ORIGIN & THE MIRACLE (of Creation)

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I could start by stating that Masato Kobayashi tries to define an identity searching for and wondering about the origin of creation - but that would sound altogether too pompous. However, I can state for a fact that Kobayashi essentially departs from the art of painting, from the sense that painting is in essence the translation of a real object into an image on the canvas. The canvas constitutes both aim and boundary, as the pictorial surface - the size of the canvas - determines the boundaries of the image. These boundaries are an element at odds with the passion of the painter. Kobayashi, therefore, has to put up a fight: he struggles with the contrast between the restraints imposed by the pictorial surface and the unrestrainedness of his infinite imagination.

The result of this struggle is situated somewhere between the two-dimensional surface and three-dimensional space; precisely in this intermediate zone the vital 'tension' originates. I remember a drawing from 1988, *Sleep*, which is typical in this sense. The artist draws a nude, but suddenly he encounters the 'boundaries' of the sheet of paper. The leg of the model will consequently be outside the drawing surface. A solution for this problem imposes itself: the anatomy of the model is adapted to the size of the support. The paintings are not different in this respect. The canvases are large-sized, of almost monumental dimensions, yet a human scale is always respected. Kobayashi takes into account the limitations of his own body. The artist must be capable to manipulate the canvas, it should not escape him. He must be able to handle, to seize the loose canvas, which hangs from the wooden stretcher like a sort of skin. Only what is practicable can result in an unusual outcome.

Painting in itself, i.e. the manipulation of paint, the gesture of painting, is what Kobayashi is particularly interested in. All knowledge about humankind and the world is reduced to the painterly gesture, which is not merely a motoric act: apart from a psychological content, its movement also refers to a struggle - the struggle between dark and light, between passion and sacrifice, between creation and loss, between ambition and fragility. Kobayashi tries to get a grip on space, yet his work precisely expresses his powerlessness in this respect.

Kobayashi's work is both a homage to the art of painting and a sort of denial of the achievements of his predecessors - his fellow painters from bygone days. It pays tribute to the art of painting, yet also seems to destroy painting. When an artist expresses himself through a medium with a long-standing tradition, a medium we are very familiar with, what is at stake is not simply the 'what-and-how-question': the question of 'why' becomes equally important.

The work must contain a certain extent of necessity. The public has to sense that the use of the specific medium is a sine qua non for the artist, that there is more involved than the nostalgic desire to continue the achievements of the great masters of a past era. Necessity and desire become one in this instance. What we are confronted with, is an inner conviction, a compelling urge which cannot be ignored. In the case of Kobayashi, I feel the presence of this urge in the work itself. It had to be, and it has to be like this in - this instance not using a brush, but using fingers and hands, elbows and the entire body. It could not be differently.

Jan Hoet, Gent, 2001