

Apropos of Raffaella della Olga's "Typed Paintings"

FOR THE KEYBOARD

By modifying the characters and signs on the type-heads of her manual typewriter and by varying the supports (from carbon or tracing paper to copper or aluminum) to produce an impressive series of single-copy books over the last few years, Raffaella della Olga has transformed a historical tool into a true medium of plastic expression, overriding the association that might have linked her to visual poetry.

The choice of the typewriter means, first of all, constraint and extreme gestural restriction, but without the will or the desire to totally effacing oneself behind the typing, and without aspiring to become a machine. By inventing her own working process, by finding a new form of complicity with the machine, the artist was able to free herself from subjectivity and approach the act of drawing by repeated strokes. Her tool allows her to cross the history of written production and reproduction, starting with the first printed texts and that of the flowers and decorative frames invented by the first typographers right up to modern forms of coding. Second, the typewriter invites us to better grasp the present, as today we are all typing at a keyboard at any given moment. In short, even freed from the semantic meaning, one never types alone, and using a manual typewriter one is necessarily aligned with other writings and other manual activities.

Raffaella della Olga began her entry into painting, her vertical adventure, with a series of works based on the same model of a grid, identified as a wall, typed on a monochrome background in acrylic. These five paintings, with their obvious beauty, have almost manifesto value: the image of confinement but also of construction inaugurating an escape from the book. From this series opened a vast field of experiments, from an almost naked black on white graphics to effects

of texture and dyeing which really touch the pictorial. Scrolling the rectangle or the square of canvas (simply coated with white or covered with a layer of gouache or acrylic), turning it to reorient the signs and pressing the ink of the ribbon or that of the carbon paper, the artist enjoys blurring the distinctions between the mediums. The type-bars of the machine become, depending on the case, pencils, punches or brushes, and the canvas's weft participates in this subtle weaving of signs and marks. In doing so, these paintings keep the memory of the paper and the way it is impregnated with ink. The opposition between painting and conceptual art is overcome, but also between gestural art and constructed art. The minimal gestural unit, that of a finger activating a key, becomes by an almost infinite iteration a means of dynamizing the canvas, of projecting there more or less tight frames, made of signs swarming and dashes crackling, creating space by playing with the spaces. The mechanical activity behind which the subject disappears becomes, by dint of movements and manipulations, the expression of a vital force.

Here, on a light blue background, is a composition of L-shaped motifs with accentuated black dashes that underline the threads of the canvas and white dashes that seem to be barely placed and give this decorative construction a living character. These strokes, which one would have liked to believe were anonymous, are

revealed, through accumulation and variations, to be rich in differences and gradually become equivalent to a pictorial touch. Elsewhere, alternating broad vertical bands of pale green are crossed by dashes or longitudinal lines, and bands of faded fuchsia on which horizontal hooks float. The hooks can be identified as typographic space markers but also suggest a work of sewing, so much so, as Derrida has argued, that writing and sewing are closely linked. In another piece, horizontal red and yellow bands striated all along the thin columns in five dashes, dashes themselves sometimes divided, in the same tones but with very subtle variations from pink to orange, effects of contrast or superposition, the dashes standing out more or less clearly from the coloured background or disappearing in it like powder in the sun because of a too close hue. These bands marked all along evoke perhaps magnetic tracks, for the eye or for the ear, with a thousand tiny shifts and disturbances that signal the presence of the human as much as the relative imperfection of the instrument. The irregularity of the coloring of the tapes, the impression of erasure sometimes, add to these magnetic tracks an effect of wear and tear or of progressive exhaustion; a continuum for mechanical piano crossed by tiny modulations. Finally, and then we will have finished with the attempts at description, there is a painting which intermingles fine touches of red and pink with the white of the canvas and seems, by an optical phenomenon, to be a floating moire. To learn that this moire is the fruit of a weaving of \$ signs adds to the confusion and one finds oneself dreaming of the agitation and the rustling of these signs entangled with lost funds.

These paintings, which combine repetitions, refrains and ironings with subtle rhythmic and chromatic variations, give the measure of their time of elaboration, and make us hear the forgotten typewriter noise. Through the diversity of motifs, reminiscent of some of the great works of abstraction (from a Paul Klee floor to an Agnes Martin sky) as well as the domestic environment, we recognize the form of a work that links the workshop and the factory. This constrained art unceasingly enlarges its field of investigation and action to produce something new. One could also define it as an art of touching the painting, as much by attacking the canvas in all directions and varying the impact of the strokes as by preserving the liveliness of the sketch even in the tightest of weaves. The woman who stands behind the keyboard, this striking subject, addresses us in the mode of a distanced intimacy.

Patrick Javault, 2022