

## *FAR FROM THE PICTURES*

Jean-Charles Vergne

THE PILL is delighted to announce Mireille Blanc's second solo exhibition at the gallery from 8 May to 14 June 2024. Entitled *Far From the Pictures*, it features a group of recent paintings emblematic of the relationship her painting establishes with images. These works form an arborescence that begins with one of the artist's iconic paintings, *Planche 2 - A.W.*, placed at the entrance to the exhibition and which can be read as an essential key to an overall understanding of Mireille Blanc's work.

Drawing on subjects borrowed from the familiar and family contexts - cakes, leftovers from children's meals or snacks, modelling clay figurines, school exercise books, etc. - the paintings reveal a wealth of cracks, small imperfections, stains and chromatic effusions that distort the image and thus contribute to the foundation of the painting. The false pieces of tape that sometimes appear discreetly around the edges, or the coloured smudges that dot the surface, provide information about the process and the origin of these paintings. In fact, they were not painted on the motif or from memory, but from photographs, with the difference that the aim here is not to reproduce the image fixed on the photograph but the photograph itself (the sheet of photographic paper) with its imperfections, stains and discolourations caused by accident during handling in the studio. A painting by Mireille Blanc is therefore the reproduction of a reproduction of an image: the subject is placed at a double distance, the images move away and the painting emerges, far from the pictures.

This representation of the photographic object, redoubled by the creaminess of the brushstroke, is a way of asserting that a painting is not an image but a surface, in order to emphasise the painting's perfect autonomy with respect to its subject. It's a question of giving painting a new body vis-à-vis images by using a creamy surface - with all the irony of certain 'creamy' paintings representing cream cakes - to bring a form of stridency to the transition from the flat image of photography to the creaminess of the pictorial touch. It is also a question of underlining the memorial role of painting in relation to photography, of showing how the painting of an image opens up the field of sensation and memory beyond the possibilities specific to photographic images. Add to this a further consideration of the fact that what is at stake in these paintings is not the reproduction of the photograph but its repetition. Reproducing and repeating are two very different acts. Repetition is not reproduction, but always contains a transformation. To repeat is to modify by moving forward, to remember is to modify by moving backwards. As Søren Kierkegaard put it, "repetition and remembrance represent the same movement, but in opposite directions".

The exhibition opens with *Planche 2 - A.W.*, a juxtaposition of barely legible images against a black background, revealing sketches of bodies and circular geometric shapes that evoke spheres, globes or ornamental panels. The painting is executed in shades of grey, with the exception of a few whites tinted with yellow, bistres and greens. The surface is marred by a multicoloured stain and a chromatic effusion that eats away at the right-hand edge of the painting. This detail is important because it provides information about the photographic origin of this painting: it is a reproduction of a picture that has been damaged by water or humidity. A clue is provided by the initials "A.W." in the title of the work: they are those of the famous iconological historian Aby Warburg, and *Plate 2 - A.W.* is inspired by his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, an immense iconographic work in progress that he conceived between 1927 and 1929 in a decisive move to overhaul the principles of the discipline of History. Aby Warburg sought to rediscover the links that secretly seemed to unite distant eras and cultures by examining their images. His famous plates, which first illustrated his lectures before becoming autonomous forms on display in the immense library of over 60,000 works that he established, are direct evidence of his concept of the iconology of the interval ("Ikonologie der Zwischen Raums"): with Aby Warburg, images can now be understood differently, on the basis of their analogies, their frictions and their unexpected connections. As Jean-Luc Godard pointed out: "There is no image, there are only images. And

there is a certain form of assemblage of images [...] There is no image, there are only relationships of images". Nevertheless, the heart of Aby Warburg's enterprise lies not so much in an archive of interconnected images as in the new way in which he looks at the gestures these images reveal. In the final analysis, his project did not consist in studying images, but rather in examining the way in which a particular type of gesture travelled through time, from era to era, from culture to culture, thus highlighting the existence of a gestural system fundamental to human civilisation, which could thus become a particular prism through which to view the history of humanity.

*Plate 2 - A.W.* opens and closes Mireille Blanc's exhibition. The choice of this iconic painting within her oeuvre provides an essential key to understanding her practice as a whole. *Plate 2 - A.W.* is not a representation of the plate from the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, but rather a representation of a photograph from this plate, which is itself made up of an assemblage of photographs. The disparate images that make up the *Mnemosyne* plate are thus unified in a single image. It's a fine synthesis of the risk of anachronism to which we are subjected when we look to the past, always perceived from the point of view of a present that operates an optical diffraction doubled with a trouble. The symptom is there, in the gradual loss of definition of the images as they are transposed, so that in the end all that remains are gestures of painting inhabited by the ghostly return of all the pictorial gestures of the history of art. Placed at the entrance and exit of the exhibition, *Planche 2 - A.W.* opens and closes an arborescence of paintings with interconnected motifs, revealing their gestures in an iconological process similar to that used by Aby Warburg to compose his plates. *Plate 2 - A.W.* dialogues with *Refrain's* childish gesture of school writing in a relationship to ritornello, to the repetition of words, gestures and images. It connects with *Dog* and its agglomerate of modelling clay, its jigsaw puzzle of disparate elements modelled by hand to create a sculpture, then an image, then the sum of painted gestures. The rest of the exhibition is a succession of rebounds, motif after motif, from the most identifiable subjects to representations rendered ambiguous by contradictory compositions and gestures. *Goûter* and *Emporte-pièce* refer to puncturing, cutting and hybridity, in a kind of Frankensteinian gesture that rubs up against the little canine monster made of modelling clay with which these two paintings dialogue in perspective. In the end, the images are summoned to beat in retreat to leave the field open to painting. *Far from the pictures.*