

**ARNAUD LABELLE-ROJOUX
ÉTANT DAMNÉS****An episode from *La Passion triste*, with Xavier Boussiron**

22.01.2021 – 13.03.2021

Is it really useful to point out what this title – literally, Being Damned – refers to? For anyone who knows *Étant donnés* (*Given*), Marcel Duchamp's last work, there can be little doubt about the answer, especially if we bear in mind that I recently wrote a short book about the 'Salt Seller'.¹ Indeed, looking carefully, the analogies with its "de-mountable approximation" are real. But not only that. The Viscont film? Its Italian title, *La caduta degli dei*, means 'the fall of the gods'. Consider the word "fall." It is about that. And the gods, too, in fact. The *Internationale*? No, although of course the damned, whom the revolutionary chant exhorts to rise up, are among those included in the title. But then who – in this period which is so dark that to me it evokes not only an earthly hell afflicted with a thousand plagues compared to which those of Egypt are small beer indeed, but also a return to the Middle Ages for a human society that the new inquisitors of every stripe are making more unbearable by the day, and that nature's revolt is threatening as it did in the most terrifying legends of bygone times –, who, I ask you, does not feel damned? In reality, this pessimism imposed by the times, which is conducive to almost delirious fantasies, still banally opposes Good and Evil. A duo as old as the world. Which can perhaps be heard in the title: *étant damnés* = "et tant d'années" [and so many years].

Montaigne says of the names given to the chapters in his *Essais* that they "do not always embrace their subject." That is of course the case with the one given to this exhibition, which, indeed, comes with a subtitle: "Un épisode de *La Passion triste*" [An Episode of the Sad Passion].

Elaborated in 2005 and conceived with Xavier Boussiron, the project titled *Manifeste de La Passion triste* set out to evoke in various modes, and independently of philosophical orthodoxy and immediate events, what this Spinozan term seemed to poetically invite: contradictory emotions, unclear feelings, a kind of creative irrationality, which our worlds share. Several events were conceived on the basis of this uncertain concept, notably the installation *Le Miracle familial*² presented at "La Force de l'art 02" at the Grand Palais, Paris, in 2009. This saw the apparition of a sculpture of a sitting donkey holding a reproduction on canvas of *Sunset over the Adriatic* by Boronali (a famous mystification; the work was partially painted by a donkey's tail) and observing a scene in which a series of works, like silent actors, were arranged in groups of two or three on the basis of seemingly unnatural affinities.

In this case we have a composite, chaotic accumulation of paintings, drawings and sculptures that reflect the disquiet buried deep in what, to put it a tad pompously, are the most primitive zones of the psyche, the representations of which (those of fear, desire, all the drives, beliefs) open onto multiple interpretations. The titles are merely clues: *Puis elle se mit à danser...* [Then she started dancing, 2020]; *Avec l'âge les raideurs changent de place* [With the years the stiff bits change places, 2020]; *Et si je mens ?* [What if I'm lying? 2020]; *Ils te crèveront les yeux* [They'll blind you, 2020]. The donkey appears again (*Asinus domestique*, 2020), particularly in the drawings, along with the pig that is still pink and the crow that is very black (*Haec Tibi Omnia Dabo*, 2020; *Good Night, Sweet Dreams*, 2020), reminding us that the animal is a symbol. Necessarily a symbol. Deliberate or not. All no doubt refer to childhood memories, mainly from books. And peopled with images. The series of small automatic paintings conceived as illustrations found in tales (*Étant damnés*, 2020) bear witness to this. Making them somewhat in the manner of a monk illuminator concerned with illusory precision, I had the feeling I was mentally hemmed in, confined within the reduced space of the sheet, with the paradoxical result of revealing a strangely theatrical unconscious which, on top of that, is in costume.

1. This was commissioned by Emmanuel Tibloux for the "Icônes", collection which he edits with Jean Cléder at Éditions François Bourin. Title of the book: *Duchamp*.

2. It was preceded by another installation, created for the Frac Aquitaine Collection at the Musée Bonnat, in Bayonne: *Les Choses à leur place* (2005), and was the subject of a book, *Le Cœur du mystère* (Les Éditions Particules, 2007), and a disc, *Le Point d'orgue musical* (Suave, 2009)

3. The film soundtrack is available on vinyl, published by Suave (2021).

4. *Beware!*

This series was the starting point for the exhibition. All its constituent elements refer to it, literally or obliquely, in various registers. And it is singularly echoed in Xavier Boussiron's video *Los Confinados*,³ made during the first lockdown as a film-soap opera in seventeen chapters. Here is the artist's explanation: "The number of chapters refers to one of the masterpieces of the 20th century, namely *The Prisoner*, conceived by Patrick McGoohan, which comprised seventeen episodes. And also Francis Picabia's famous: "So what is left? On one side illness, on the other, death. There you have it." *Very Passion triste*, don't you think? *Los Confinados* is about ingratitude, bad faith, rivalry, domination, the desire for power and bigotry invented on the hoof. It takes place in a period when everybody is confined to their basket, condemned to dig their hole. Not a hole to jump in out of despair, but a hole to look through. As the thorny Spinoza said, *Caute!*"⁴

Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux

Born in 1950, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux is an artist, performer and writer. His practice, which proceeds by shifting genres, takes the form of prolific visual works (drawings, collages, canvases, sculptures, etc.), a corpus of writings (fictional, critical) and a series of actions (performances, talks). These different but interdependent forms of expression fit into the field of art-action theorised by the artist. His work invokes a wide range of imagery drawn from art history (Caravaggio, Duchamp, Fluxus), philosophy (Spinoza) and popular culture (Elvis, The Beach Boys, *Fantômas*).

Placing high culture and subculture on the same level, Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux's walls convey his artistic thought, in which the different entities brought into play cohabit without order or classification. His is a "flat ontology" interfering with all kinds of imposed reading and encouraging multidirectional and de-hierarchised interpretations.

Xavier Boussiron

Wary of both the incomprehensible hoarding of art and the inflationist production of furniture-objects that clutter the corners of studios and museum store rooms, and despite his use of multiple practices, Xavier Boussiron sees music as his favoured medium. Music and its genres, even the most narrative ones, as a way of talking about the formless and in formulable. Because, finally, art is an easy thing to make but rather difficult to say. With music we are always two steps from reality – not very far, then.

He produced his first record, *Rien qu'un cœur de poulet*, in 1995. It features his instrumental versions of songs by Roy Orbison. The record, strangely, was a sensation with some highly diverse artists (Mike Kelley, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Claudia Triozzi, Stéphane Bérard and Marie-Pierre Brébant, and not forgetting Arnaud Labelle-Rojoux), with whom he then had the good fortune to collaborate. His most notable collaboration is the one he has been working on for over twenty years with the Compagnie du Zerep, founded by Sophie Perez, as co-author/designer and composer. A monograph going back over the adventures of Zerep is being prepared for publication in autumn 2021 by Flammarion.

Boussiron has just composed the soundtrack for the latest film by Alain Guiraudie, "Viens, je t'emmène" (working title), due for theatrical release in autumn 2021. This is the second time they have worked together, after *Le Roi de l'évasion* in 2009.

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Gallery opening hours: Tues–Sat, 11am–7pm and by appointment