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RIVER AND LANDSCAPE

“Dripping” as a technique was first used by Jackson Pollock at the end of the 1940s, and is intrinsically related to the work process and the work of this artist. An expressive, pictorial strategy, actually learnt from the surrealist Max Ernst, who by means of dripping and running paint over the canvas, explored action, gestures, literal immersion in the painting, and also the different frontiers between chance and control. Identification between technique / process and artist to the point where Pollock himself would become known as “Jack the Dripper”, and “Dripper”.

Nevertheless, and although in a hypothetical, fictitious world championship of Dripping, I am sure Pollock would be crowned the indisputable champion, winning by a long way. Jest aside, the truth is there is life after him, insofar as referring to dripping as a technique for plastic creation is concerned. I am undoubtedly thinking about the work by Markus Linnenbrink and his work process in *Photo Drips*. This German artist, born in Dortmund and residing in New York since the nineties, has an interesting and original (which can also rhyme with personal, singular, special, differential...) pictorial technique which offers a different outlook, and above all a different mark and register, to the multiple expressive and creative possibilities allowed through the use of mechanical, plastic dripping. But we shall deal with this in sections:

Unlike Pollock, who allowed the paint to drip, and almost literally to run, onto the surface of the canvas with minimal control, permitting the colour to practically cover the whole of the surface almost in an organic, irregular fashion, in the case of Linnenbrink the application of the paint is carried out according to clearly controlled patterns, following a vertical and parallel direction, from top to bottom, clear and in straight lines on the whole piece. This absolute control over the trajectory of the colour when sliding down the painting goes way beyond that “controlled chance” referred to by Max Ernst, comprising one of the differentiating features of his pictorial process. This process, we shall say it now, is based on the use of pigmented epoxy resins, which are applied on photographs fitted to wooden panels using the controlled “dripping” technique. The lines of paint hang down parallel to

each other over the surface, forming chromatic paths, as if they were straight-lined, coloured organic marks, or to paraphrase Baudelaire, as if they were: *“tears that are added to the face of beauty, like a river adds to the landscape...”* Afterwards, on the final horizon of the painting, these lines stop dead, quite literally, and as if suddenly committing suicide, they freeze, hanging over the edge of the chasm, forming a peculiar orography of coloured, serrated teeth.

The use of these very resins is likewise another identity mark of this artist. Although he started, as is usual, by using oil paint, he has been using a mixture of powdered pigment and resins that allow effects to be achieved which would be impossible with more traditional pictorial materials. Among others, that of conferring physicality, body and above all a subtle, yet powerful, three-dimensional nature. Moreover, unlike other artists, he does not use resins only because of their shine or luminosity, covering the surface to form a specular, compact surface, but rather seeks other features and textures, whilst establishing an interesting dialogue between the sensual gloss of the resin and the opaque, matt spirit of the photographs comprising the first skin of these pieces of work (which a halfway between painting and photography). These images originating from an endless iconographic source of existing photographs or photographs that the artist himself takes with his iPhone, and also, in the case of the larger paintings, plunging into the no less endless ocean of his personal memories, through his father's photographic archives. From collective matters to personal affairs. From time gone to time present, two moments that always conjugate when we use the verb “to photograph”. Finally, on this iconographic basis, he applies those spillages of brilliant, thickened colour that end up building new stratified layers and new chromatic levels of visual representation.

Colour, density, stratification..., those are the terms that could be perfectly well applied to the organic sculptures that he also presents us with. To a large extent I perceive them as 3-D translations of these pictorial strategies. The colour breaks out of the limits of two dimensions to create chromatic, organic forms in the volumetric time of space. These sculptural pieces are likewise built up using layers of bright, shiny colours, as if they were plans taken from sensual, tonal, fantastic orography.

Colour is, practically, the great guest of honour at the festival in all his work. A chromatic festival in which the greens, oranges, pinks, blues, reds, yellows, violets... talk, laugh,

communicate and sometimes even shout. It is therefore not at all surprising that, as the artist himself states, Matisse, the emperor of colour, is one of his principal and recurring references. And something perhaps even more revealing, he also says that at the start of his career colour represented something like an unknown lure, something that was desired and feared at the same time. “*Somehow*” he tells us “*a trip to Italy where I spent three weeks painting outdoors was what gave me the idea of colour [...] I get the feeling I had to walk around on earth and mud for a long time to finally reach the light*”. In the end, the final and desired station *Termini* of all acolytes of this age-old profession of lights (and shadows) is, and will always be, painting...

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