

## art press



Mireille Blanc came to critical attention at the Salon de Montrouge in 2011. She works with reprocessed photos and often with folk art, exploring the appearance and disappearance of images, and is now poised to pursue new directions.

Hanging on a wall in Mireille Blanc's studio is a portrait of Marcel Proust. It's just there for its own sake, not because it inspired any of her paintings. Also present are a Mantegna *Mocking of Christ*, a Leonard Cohen vinyl, lots of books (about Manet, Luc Tuymans, Peter Doig, etc.) and a tapestry representing Saint Fabiola found at a flea market—she and I both wondered if a copy should be sent Francis Alÿs to complete his collection.

Blanc's images seem to be emerging into view. Painting is her medium. At first glance her forms seem abstract, or at least hard to identify. Often they remain rather mysterious. We figure out that what we are seeing is little stuffed animals or a birthday cake. Other pictures are self-apparent, sometimes with the aid of a title, like *Les Marches*, a stairway seen from above, covered with particleboard, which appears as such and then disappears again in the form of a fan. There is a fragile evanescence in this back-and-forth, and the world under her gaze is marked by a deep disquiet.

### FRAGMENTS

Many of Blanc's paintings show popular art objects such as sports trophies, decorated bottles and carnival masks. Others feature details of bodies, such as a bust wearing a polo shirt adorned with embroidered letters, a pleated skirt and an eye with a few loose strands of hair. Sometimes we find imperceptible citations of famous paintings. Recently she became interested in flat surfaces decorated with motifs: a sheet of carbon paper bearing the imprint of lines, a floral ceramic tile, a cubbyhole bookcase on which a photo has turned white in the light of a camera flash (a sort of metaphor for her work overall). In general, she shows only fragments of her subjects, often seen upside down in an incongruous position or from an unusual point of view. In a different vein, some of her paintings verge on kitsch, infused with a frightening, almost off-putting violence. Plastic dolls and porcelain statuettes seem to become monsters. Often Blanc doesn't realize what a painting represents until she has finished it. Perhaps that kitsch should be understood as the dark side of her unconscious. Instead of an effort to be goofy, funny or ironic, it is probably a sign of a ferocious anxiety.

Her brushwork is highly recognizable because of its particular combination of thickness and lightness. "The line goes in the

same direction as the object to render it material," she explains. She makes her paintings quickly, completing each one in a single session lasting only a few hours. If they are usually small format, it is because of their "back worlds," as she calls them, the meticulous preparatory work—the searching and making of source images. Blanc collects all sorts of photos to provide inspiration for her paintings. Many of them come from family albums. Then there are the postcards found in second-hand shops, and the photos she takes herself—for instance, a small inflatable rubber monkey, so folded as to be almost unrecognizable, probably dating to the 1950s (also found in a second-hand shop). She never goes looking on the Net or in magazines, and there's no scanner in her studio. Instead she rephotographs the images, runs them out on her small desk-top printer, blows them up or sometimes paints or draws on them, reframing them while keeping or eliminating the smudges to better balance the image. "I never compose; I reframe," she volunteers. The resulting stained, low-quality prints are reminiscent of some of the pictures taken by Miroslav Tichy with his home-made cameras. It is only then, when her documents are ready, that she can start to paint. Are there really documents? Will she show them one day? Blanc needs filters before she can get interested in an image, the images that appear in a ghostly form in her paintings.

It would see that her practice has reached a turning point marked by a desire to transcend the stretcher while remaining faithful to painting. This is literally the case with the images shown floating on the wall, framed only by the canvas's white margins. Perhaps her preliminary work with source images is being revealed in collage form as retouched photos mingle with drawings on tracing paper, another truly ghostly touch (*lodé*). In some cases source images and paintings are shown together, as in *RN 74*, a collage where an aerial photo of a house alongside a road is combined with the home's ghost, painted and then removed. Blanc is also making charcoal drawings on tracing paper that yield a photographic texture, revisiting the approach—a series of aligraphic prints—she first took up while doing her graduation project in art school. While continuing a long-standing experimentation, today her work is entering new territories. ■

Translation, L-S Torgoff

Ci-dessus/above:

« Reproductions », 2013

Huile sur toile, 54 x 60 cm.

Oil on canvas