

SOPHIE TRAMIER

Another vision of still life

“Images conceived for eyes, seeing as though they are visions, are close to the machination of dreams.”
(Marc Le Bot, in “L’œil du peintre”)

If still life, a major genre in the history of art, went through a considerable formal revival during the second half of the 19th century, in reality, it is still often linked to the Vanitas style: time suspended, its passage portrayed, artistic representation illustrating the fragility of things by giving another meaning to the fugacity of life through prolongation.

The representation of food, extremely present in modern and contemporary art, deeply reinvents this genre through different forms. As early as 1936-37, in Magritte’s work *This is a piece of cheese*, a piece of cheese is represented in a painting which is placed under a real glass dome, creating a disturbing dialogue that questions our perception of what is real and what is symbolism. In today’s consumer society, food is often considered as a model, just as pop art captures everyday life and represents it using flagship products, which in turn become icons.

Sophie Tramier’s photographic work is deeply inspired by the beauty of objects that surround us in everyday life, and by the perfection of our visible world. Yet she searches for a spiritual dimension present in their reality, revealing the poetic nature of inanimate objects and the sensuality of texture and substance. Just as a cabinet of curiosities regroups all sorts of significant and incongruous objects, the subjects in Sophie Tramier’s photographic works have an effect on memory and recollection on what surrounds us. Her works explore many directions (texture, substance, movement, light...), but she always pays great attention to the *mise-en-scène*. The portraits of fish simply placed in the frame seem to be playing with the nearby objects which could torture them, shrimps delicately hanging from a tree like coral are perceived in an element other than an aquatic environment from where they come. This humorous plastic organization

functions owing to the extremely high quality of her photography and her pictorial sense of color. The strength of her photography lies also in a combination of the precision in her work as well as her *modus operandi*. Accustomed to working with silver halide, she kept all the same qualities when she started working with digital cameras: depth and richness of texture, a velvety grain, not forgetting the *chiaroscuro* effects she creates in her exclusive use of natural light.

In her last photographic series, *White & Black Drama*, she lets her inspiration and imagination develop within two frames. There is the frame of the shot and the framework of the box, her cabinet of curiosities, in which she places the objects. She plays on the box within the box within the box... she plays with disorientation of perspective and depth, false three-dimensionality, disorientating the viewer who wonders if the work is photography, painting or sculpture. She also challenges reality photography by using distorting techniques, but also by giving objects a new role, a disguised symbolism, another story.

Her displaying and staging lies in a complex temporality: a present moment is suspended in time by the photo shot, but preceded by long preparation of the objects and the box. The theatrical aspect of this series clearly follows on from her previous photographic work, in which she constantly sought to create an atmosphere by placing her subjects in unusual and ambiguous situations.

Her photos are developed on paper that is similar to watercolor paper, which reinforces their pictorial quality and the subtlety of nuance in color. She lights each photographic work as though it is a painting, through her choice of perspective lines and key elements, further creating balance through color.

In this series, Sophie Tramier shows affinity with the idea of betrayal of the represented objects (the painted object is not the object yet still is), which is a similar theme that Magritte developed in his work. She further exaggerates this idea using a combination of techniques before the final photographic shot, blurring perceived reality. Like Magritte, she is interested in the evocative power of doubly inanimate objects: they have

reached the end of their existence, but they are also “living” in a timeless confinement within the work. If she perches a bird on a branch that is sprouting a leaf, and imprisons it behind a lightweight cage, she is nonetheless giving it another space of freedom with the key on which the bird is resting, which could equally be the key of dreams.

The diversions she creates with the objects/subjects in her still lifes, and the assemblage of heterogeneous elements in boxes, are like an allusion to Man Ray and Picabia. There is always a magical moment in Sophie Tramier’s photography where the ideal collides with reality.

Hélène Bastais

Art historian and curator