

Esther Villalobos

Text by Françoise Jaunin (original in French)

The Slow Splendor of Meditation

Monotype exclusively. The choice is singular and tells a love story between ink and paper, the plate and the printing press, control and the unforeseen, the meditative slowness and the brightness of the transfigured gesture. These are the partners that Esther Villalobos has chosen to accompany her on the path of finding herself and approaching others. A path that, far from the hubbub of current times, privileges interiority and silence.

The work of Esther Villalobos is an art of the minimal.

Few shapes: spots, strokes, footprints. And a lot of space left blank, empty. Little color: the range of grays with their infinity of gradients is so immense, it says, that it has the feeling that it will never be able to cover them all. Just with a few drops and splashes of parsimonious red, here or there to make your palette of grays vibrate. Little thickness: light and fragile materials, "thin" materials, fluids, without fillings, never.

Little noise: rather a quality of silence or small inner music that is insinuated and makes its way.

Few declamatory effects: an intimate, almost confidential relationship with the one who looks at it.

There is something oriental about this laconism. A need to strip oneself, to reduce to the essential that is inspired by Zen meditation as an exercise of concentration and as a faculty of leaving room for the void to better welcome the world and others. But there is nothing pseudo-Japanese. Esther Villalobos does not mimic at all the ideograms of the calligrapher painters of the empire of The Rising Sun. What she takes as an example is an attitude that goes through a long conditioning, a mental preparation that leads to the just, brilliant gesture, without possible regret. Like a haiku without words, a rush of emotion both alive in writing and meditative in tone. Why "surround" the engraving? Why choose "deferred" over direct action on canvas or paper? Why not painting, drawing? Because, she says, the engraving allows to combine both: the direct action on the plate that attacks in "raw", without the help of acid, then the deferred printing that, when passing under the press, performs a process of transfiguration. The multiplying faculty of the stamp? It doesn't worry her. She is interested in the monotype. The paradoxical print that there is only one copy, but that implies this ambiguous mixture - which is what interests her most, of intimacy and distance at the same time. The plate serves as revealing in the almost photographic sense of the term. The transfer on paper removes a point the confidence too intimate. Preserved, at the same time, its uniqueness.

Engraving is also a tactile matter. From the outset, the grain of the paper. Its lightness. Its mixture of fragility and resistance. Its refusal to deceive: "It says it all, with it you can't lie." And its way of "drinking" the ink. The ink, precisely. Opaque or transparent, more or less dry or wet, luminous or dark, invites or combines on probation the games of spontaneity and chance with the control and discipline of gesture and tool. The ink. Esther talks about her as a treat. It likes to vary the temperatures to make it change its viscosity and therefore the writing speed and the nature of absorption on the paper. As she likes to then hang his sheet freely on the wall, without frame or glass, so that he wants to touch it. Recently, Esther's prints have expanded their formats and "focused" their details and at the same time

have been structured in space. Computer science and sculpture have come to help her. It is, by the change of scale and the inscription in the third dimension, to induce another look at the stamping. From her own prints, the artist pulls giant specimens from the inkjet printer that she cuts into fragments. Like pieces of exploded puzzles that he glues on modular supports of white wood, stelae in which he structures the geometry with cuts, niches and reliefs. What the engraving loses in tactile and sensual materiality, it gains in is culturality and in taking possession of space. On the one hand, the inaccessible, evanescent character of these interior landscapes that dissolve in the virtual dust particles of their close-ups, on the other, the tense stops, the right angles and the physical presence of their white structures. The set is built with scraps and bounces. Work is a continuous search for itself, re-escaping – which is much better than to settle into a way of doing things and exploit a vein. From the monotype Esther Villalobos makes a continuous "work in progress" exploring its multiple paths on the plate, overflowing it more and more, like a visual poetry that does not cease to be invented when it is realized.