

FLORENCE LOEWY

9 RUE DE THORIGNY FR-75003 PARIS www.florenceloewy.com

Florence Loewy is pleased to present :

Faire des fleurs (Doing flowers)

*with Rémy Brière, Morgan Courtois, Ann Craven, Daniel Gordon, Inga Kerber,
Christophe Lemaitre, Aurélien Mole, Jean-Luc Moulène, Kate Owens, Batia Suter
curated by Camille Azais*

On view from November 15 to December 20, 2014

Mondrian painted flowers. We know of about one hundred fifty paintings and drawings by him representing almost invariably a solitary flower emerging from a neutral ground, painted with expression and vigor. There is a great contrast between Mondrian's paintings of flowers and his neo-plastic system, which he developed in parallel; and if they remain little known[1], it is at once because of the contempt which the painter's commentators held for these figurative works, but also because of the artist's own reluctance. The flowers were a way of making some money, a minor practice. Mondrian "made flowers" to earn his living, at a time where his abstract canvases were met with incomprehension. And yet, Mondrian liked painting flowers, and despite his efforts to backdate some of them in order to pass them off as youthful works, this production would accompany him along his entire career.

The critic Michel Seuphor, the most important biographer of the artist, recounts that Mondrian said to him one day in 1925 or 1926: "Now, I don't care, I may starve, but I don't want to paint any more flowers." This rejection took part of his larger distaste for nature, more and more obvious as the artist followed the path of abstraction. Seuphor tells that one day, at Albert Gleizes' home, he asked to change seats at the table in order to not eat facing the trees of the Bois de Boulogne. And yet, how to explain such an aversion in an artist whose work would turn western painting upside down, thanks to an extraordinary series of paintings of trees? Surely because the artist knew that his love for the forms of nature was opposed to the extremely exigent, almost fanatical, goal that he had set for himself. And that by taking

this difficult path alone, he renounced in a certain way an almost guilty fascination

This exhibition has been thought as an homage to Mondrian's flowers. It gathers the "flowers" of ten contemporary artists that one could qualify as conceptual, because their work is based on an intellectual process of questioning the image. Under their different forms, the works brought together for this exhibition borrow from the history of floral representation in painting and the decorative arts: artisanal wallpaper by Morris & Sanderson (Kate Owens), Ikebana (Christophe Lemaitre & Aurélien Mole), decorative bronzes (Rémy Brière), photographs of plants (Jean-Luc Moulène, Batia Suter, Inga Kerber), watercolors (Ann Craven), collage (Daniel Gordon), dried flowers (Morgan Courtois). The motif of the flower is a pretext to approach the limits of the genre; a research that takes the form of indefatigable repetition of the same subject in the work of Ann Craven for example, or on the contrary, of the suppression of the motif in the work of Kate Owens; by the deconstruction of the conventions of still life in the work of Jean-Luc Moulène; or again by the artificial reconstruction of a simulacrum of a flower based on digital images in the work of Daniel Gordon. The whole emancipates itself from simple figurative representation and permits us to think that perhaps the floral genre survives only through its own exhaustion; and that it is above all as a non-subject that the flower continues to appear in contemporary art. But, that would surely be too simple. For the ensemble testifies to an ambiguity which is not without recalling that of Mondrian. By their attraction and repulsion, these works come to ask the question -still relevant- of the relationship artists have with nature's forms, with the decorative and with conventions. They demonstrate that the yet well-known (and re-known) lines of the orchid or the flower in the field are still the pretext for invention and experimentation. For rather than the non-subject, is not the flower the subject of art par excellence?

Translated by David Malek

[1] And this despite an exhibition devoted to them in 1991 at the Sidney Janis Gallery, "Mondrian Flowers in American Collections."

Camille Azaïs