

## ***Lucid and ludic***<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Benard takes hold of the highlight of history of arts and architecture, that is the *Tivoli mania*<sup>2</sup>, and transposes it into the *chez-robert* gallery context, thus developing an *in-situ* project of which the comprehension is done in several steps spread out in time and space.

Act I: the scene is established. Seven architectural elements arranged according to the rough form of a temple (colonnade, portico), which are more real than realist, and are found on a series of images. Endowed with a watchful eye, one is enabled to identify the materials in which they have been carved or cut (white plaster, black wood, reddening Plexiglas of which frailty underlines the fictional nature) with the model maker's own thoroughness. On stage, no actors, only components of a sculptural, generic, hieratic environment have pride of place, using minimal effects. However, something is unsettling the linear reading of images, that is the views which are incompatible, and where no match is possible, where "jump-cuts" seem paradoxically intentional.

The architectural silhouette is not fixed in the gallery space and plays with our points of reference and the fictional wandering in which it was spreading until now. The images create an illusion which carry us away and is satisfied by a set of elements which are seemingly articulated but, in the end, it exploits our reading which is subject to the screen's two-dimensional filter.

Act II: the staging is set up. Daylight hits the setting's eclectic texture, its rays are diffracted by the fiery red wall, digging the room walls further. Traditionally associated to theatre setting, the colour choice underlines the artificiality and the symbolic area of representation. Yet, certain walls have fallen, as if literally blown by a breath of air, opening the gallery onto a new dimension. In order to realise his project, Thomas Benard went into Jura mountains country, where *chez-robert* project is taking place. Both with this trip and the exterior - documentary - shot, he confers a new status to the gallery (a symbolic value). The model (it does exist and has a physical reality) is no more just an exhibition's framework, an accessory. In fact, its natural location and its surroundings take a constitutive part of the project, acting as a background image, a wallpaper. This open air inscription tightens the contemporary connection with Sybil's temple, of which the spectacular landscape where it was located – combining architectural composite and sublime nature - attracted artists.

---

<sup>1</sup> From G. Genette, *Palimpsestes*, Le Seuil, coll. « Poétique », 1982.

<sup>2</sup> « Star-subject » as nicknamed by José de Los Llanos, *Tivoli, variations sur un paysage au XVIII<sup>ème</sup> siècle*, « Tivoli : un exercice de style », Paris-Musées, 2010, p. 20.

Act III: it completes the reference to the original site, where representations and comments merge. A set of quotes – as many actors in the scenery – is now added to the pictures, extracted from descriptions of Tivoli's site. Those quotes recall that if certain artists travelled to the ancient site over centuries, many of them only heard or read about descriptions, true *ekphrasis* dominating the site reproduction.

With this series of distance-taking from the original content, Thomas Benard is looking critically at the status of images and the conditions of their stratified emission-reception, especially in the new mass media “iconophage” context. Displaying in its multiple dimensions hypertext usage (underlying links in computer language), he spreads confusion, plays with the reuse of existing structures, recalling quote and transformation practices qualified in literary theory by Gerard Genette as “hypertextual”, cocking an ultimate snook at the picturesque connection and the exercise in style, where the viewer's power is actually to be aware of show's mechanisms.

Claire Migraine, London, January 2012  
Translated by Noémie Bénard  
[Thankyouforcoming.net](http://Thankyouforcoming.net)