

Echoes

There are architectures that survive, beyond their former use, thanks to their very peculiar character. It is obviously the case of the water tower in the city of Bourges, if you focus on the contrast between the deliberate decorative aspect of its external façade and the great sobriety of its interior, which develops a mysteriously monastery atmosphere.

Indeed, as any circular site, it possesses its own magic with its two ambulatories topped by a barrel vault. The pillars' vertical structures bring rhythm to our path, which renews itself, in search of a spatial reference. We feel as if plunged into the belly of a unique architecture with rigid and flexible shapes, melting majestic verticals and generous curves. The body of this structure even reveals its full-on stone sensuality when discreetly exposed by the light.

Let us imagine for a minute that we walk through this site in a vesperal darkness. We would lose our steps in a never-ending round amplified by the vaults' echo, designed to better misdirect us. Yes, this site is impressive. It is the expression of a contraction of volumes around its central axis in the small ambulatory and, at the same time, it opens the space by inviting the eyes to sound out the height and magnitude of the vaults, which radiate in the niches of the external ambulatory. We are confronted with unusual perspectives, which hide from view and suggest an echo of pillars, arcatures, their inflections stretching in all directions, like so many answers to our visual questioning, caught in the vertigo of low-angle shots.

My plastic arts' bias suggested a combination of repetition and deformation of interior volumes, recalling the site's rationale or « raison d'être » : the liquid element, both in a virtual and in a real tangible way.

Water is suggested by the use of the blue colour and the multiplicity of curved rhythms that remodulate the space, evoking both content and container. The chosen materials, like pipes, already take on a circular shape. Circles, semi-circles are recurring patterns which entail most of the figures drawn on the different chosen supports. The relations between the verticals, the curves, the obliques, their projections in low-angle shots on flat or cylindrical surfaces, implying visual distortions and variations depending on viewpoints, constitute the underlying frame of my multiple plastic interpretations. Some installations suggest their own echo by using tubular shapes and playing with the variety of their positioning in the large niches : vertical hanging or diagonal positioning, suspension and kinetic effect evoke the loop pathway of the architecture.

The majority use of black and white contrasts is designed to hook us in(to) the rather austere atmosphere of the site. Such a choice, tempered by the presence of intermediate values such as grey or the symbolic blue colour, serves to polarise our vision on the pieces and installations. Let us not forget that the essential principle of sculpture is to inhabit the space through a double game, (one) of radiance and magnetism, one or the other capable of asserting itself in any artistic movement or particular work.

The liquid element presents itself in glass cylindrical volumes that line up the central core. It contains a series of immersed digital prints experiencing new optical distortions in direct connection with the viewer's movement. This proposition combines the magic of metamorphosis and anamorphosis.

The windows posed a particular problem for me. They are not regularly located on the structure periphery and their square or rectangular shapes seem to disturb the harmony of the whole building. This is why many artists chose not to take them into account. For my part, I decided instead to use their hollow volume by highlighting their orthogonal rhythms as counterpoints to the mostly curved rhythms of the building.

A magical place is complete in itself. There is no need to dress it up, if only with a simple ornament of light. But this water tower now has a new purpose, that of being a place of art. Indeed, many participants had the opportunity to display their works in this impressive space by playing with the most varied scales, shapes, colors and materials.

My exhibition is untitled "Echoes". This is a direct homage to the site. It uses a formal vocabulary which is already mine, for example that of cylindrical and of all basic geometric shapes. It underlines my artistic approach : galvanise these shapes in space, suggest polyrhythmic readings through contrasting partitions, the reading of which can be induced by the viewer's movement. It amplifies my strategy by declining visual distortions until the anamorphosis. Finally, it is based on my experience of installations. In reference to Buren, I consider the work as a visual tool that interacts with the site: it plays with the interpretation of space, and in turn, the latter determines its own reading.

I hope that the audience was both confused and seduced by my proposition. Indeed, there can be no creation without this form of initial surprise that induces a new form of perception. I do not claim anything revolutionary in this abstract language of mine. I simply invited you to rediscover the place born in my imagination and my sensitive experience as an artist. This exhibition is important to me both in its scope and singularity. It embodies the evolution of my research. It was a unique meeting with an audience acquainted or not with the artistic history of the old water tower of the city of Bourges.

Philippe Vacher – mars 2011