

# Françoise Pétrovitch

September 9th - October 28th, 2017

Opening on Saturday September 9th, from 11 am to 9 pm

[...] *While singing in minor mode  
Of victorious love and easy life  
They don't seem to believe in their happiness  
And their song is mingling with the moonshine, [...]*  
Paul Verlaine, *Clair de lune*, in *Fêtes Galantes*, 1869

## Sonatinas in red and pink

Samuel Beckett once described Ludwig van Beethoven's *Seventh Symphony* as a 'sound surface, torn by enormous black pauses,' so that 'nothing but a giddy path of sounds linking unfathomable abysses of silence'<sup>1</sup> could be perceived. Whereas this was achieved in the field of music, Françoise Pétrovitch seems to have undertaken a similar project in the visual arts since the beginning of her now two-decade-long career. Indeed, her transitions from intimacy to extimacy, drawing to painting, sheets of paper to wall surfaces, plan to volume, and ceramics to bronze, have assuredly opened gaps in her work, but the giddiness at its very core has mostly to do with an indescribable quality, which resists any attempts at interpretation.

Thus, our eyes have been wandering a while along the paths cut by Françoise Pétrovitch over time—the childhood landscapes bordering her work, the impressions overflowing it, the sensations brushing the sheets of paper, the emotions drowning in ink, the sentiments halting in the suspense of a stroke. Yet, in order to give more light, density, intensity, and depth to her subjects, the artist ended up restraining this expressive surge, which her forms, colours, lines and gestures had brought to its acme. Painting then allowed her to figuratively prune or distil her aesthetics so as to get to the heart and soul of things and beings. In her series *Nocturne*, pictorial backgrounds were draped into the murk of shadows and nights, flowers withered on their stem, faces shut down, and the colour red spread onto the figures' bare hands, their protective gloves dropped off on the ground.

Françoise Pétrovitch has now, it seems, found peace with her work and all these narratives, her life as an artist and her own story. Her painting has returned to being as luminous as a clearing over the edge of a forest, as fresh as a river, as soft as a green pasture, and as pink as a blushing cheek. Bringing to mind Maurice Denis's adage—'Remember that a painting, before being a battle horse, a nude woman, or an anecdote of some sort, is essentially a flat surface covered with colours, put together in a certain order'—, her monotonous chants and laments, which used to pierce torn silences, have made way for refined counterpoints, subtle intervals, inventive superimpositions, continuous shifts, autonomous yet airy plans of colours, and rapid gestures determining the overall 'order,' sometimes a *staccato*, sometimes a *vibrato*. That being said, the *allegro* doesn't burst where the sweet song of melancholia has retreated. Discreet and so light, more trembling than ever, reverie is still audible. If her figures are no longer masked, their eyes nonetheless remain closed before the pictorial eternity, and it's up to us to open them up with all the strength of our gaze.

Marc Donnadiou

Translation Violaine Boutet de Monvel

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to Axel Kaun; 7 July 1937, quoted in Mark Nixon, *Samuel Beckett's German Diaries 1936-1937*, London: A & C Black, 2011.