

Harmonious Society, the intoxication of a lost harmony.

"The poorer the means, the stronger the expression," explains Pierre Soulage. This equation perfectly describes Olivier Catté's work. For over 10 years, the Rouen-based painter has been using recycled cardboard boxes to invest his favorite subject - the city. For the painter, these cardboard boxes found in the street are an emblem of consumer society, but above all the starting point for his work. "I love the commodity past of these packing boxes. They're everywhere. It's a kind of icon or symbol of the global society. Above all, it's a way of getting at something that's essential to me, based on this self-imposed constraint," explains Olivier Catté. It's an approach akin to the transfiguration of the banal dear to the philosopher Arthur Danto. This material, as raw as it is commonplace, is recuperated with its traces of experience, its inscriptions, its tears and wefts.

Olivier Catté is going to "peel" this cardboard, cut it with a cutter, coat it with ink and pigment, scratch it, tear it to reveal a city. The city. Olivier Catté's cities. Not content to confine himself to this "poor" material, the artist is obsessively attached to this theme, which feeds his work exclusively.

And the more unique the theme, the more powerful the invention. It's the painter's talent to always surprise us, to make us see, to bring out the "unseen": not the invisible, but a visible that has never been seen before. Olivier Catté constantly reinvents the city to show us its weave, like that of the cardboard he uses.

It began with the New York Cartons series, which showcases the power of this unrivalled architectural setting. The city is there, cinematic, panoramic and vertical. A giant of steel and glass, imposing itself on the eye to stupefy it. From 2011, a more abstract landscape emerges from Olivier Catté's cartoons. Inspired by the low-rent buildings of certain New York neighborhoods, with Interface, the city becomes more asphyxiating, revealing a futuristic universe of blocks and bars. Architecture fades into the background, revealing the oppressive nature of the urban fabric. Volume and perspective interlock like the cogs of a dehumanizing mechanism. The Cityscapes series unveils the plan of an abstract urban fabric, with blocks and intersecting streets, revealing a diagram of the city. Aerial, the gaze seems carried by the flight of a drone. In recognition of the evidence of networks.

During a month-and-a-half-long artist residency in China, Olivier Catté will open a new series and inaugurate a new city. When he accepted the invitation, along with fifty other French artists, the painter didn't know what he was looking for. He set off blind, with no other expectation than to see... something else, something different. When the local authorities ask him what his project is, what he intends to do, the painter replies "I'll tell you when I've found it". Catté has always been resistant to speeches. As a painter, he doesn't talk. He paints, then shows. Only the work justifies the painter's research and approach. "I'm not interested in discourse as such," explains Olivier Catté. The painting must stand on its own, without the need to read the artist's intention". In paint.

In China, Olivier Catté discovers a paradoxical but fertile environment. Housed in a small ghost town under construction, the city seems to float in the mist. Mountains and buildings coexist in a flow of traffic "like breaths, rather than masses", says the painter. An opportunity to deterritorialize the gaze and challenge Western perspective, both mental and physical. At least, the way the painter uses it. In the hope of touching the viewer's perspective too. To surprise them anew. And break the eye's laziness. The eye likes permanence. It is "lazy" and

willingly obeys the ritornello of the visible, the one that allows a quiescent vision. Cartesian: he needs certainty. The painter's job is to thwart this expectation. And Olivier Catté excels at it.

Zen, the Chinese environment? Not really: the universe is polluted, both physically and psychologically. Tensions and control reign. The promised and vaunted harmonious society has given way to an "Intoxicating City", as prophetically mentioned in an inscription printed on a Chinese cardboard box. An opportunity for Olivier Catté to "dirty" the beautiful craftsmanship, but also to reintroduce movement. Harmonious Society takes the line out of the rectilinear. The cutter is no longer omnipresent. It has given way to tearing, but also to bombing and the flow of ink, which decadence the form to reveal a rootless, floating city. A metaphor for the painter's quest? Perhaps. The vanishing points multiply to the point of panicking the gaze as it seeks where to land. Tensions materialize around buildings lost in a dynamic that overtakes them. And, for the first time, the city seems to fade away. As if swallowed up by the mist and the forces surrounding it. Faced with this spectacle, the eye is intoxicated by Olivier Catté's latest works. He too is "Intoxicated".

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