

## **Emilie Pitoiset**

*“History is two faced, like Janus.  
Whether it looks at the past or present it sees the same things.”*

Maxime Du Camp

Emilie Pitoiset’s work builds itself with precision and singularity through a series of paradoxes that reveal her centres of interest, and that are as universal as the notions of adding and subtracting, falling and balancing, documentary and fiction, symmetry and repetition, attraction and repulsion... Each work is the result of refining a subtle mix of contradictory elements that contrive to generate a particular tension.

Like some of her contemporaries, Emilie Pitoiset does not reproduce forms familiar from art history. She rather appropriates, in fragments, resources drawn from various sources, from the erudite to pop culture, such as Nouvelle Vague cinema, literature and Nouveau Roman but also documentary, history, or simple, everyday images and objects. The archive reinterpreted and elevated to the rank of art echoes the questioning of philosopher Jacques Rancière: what is art?

“if art doesn’t establish itself in opposition to that which already exists, but rather from this” then how is one to make a selection from the existing material? In other words, what does one do with all that one absorbs? Pitoiset tirelessly and shrewdly tries to address these questions amongst others, trying to bring back the fragments of an answer. For her take on Franju’s *Le Sang des Bêtes* (Blood of the Beasts) Pitoiset concentrates on a precise part of the film. With the elimination of the narration, this excerpt of the documentary returns to the status of archive footage. Then, through editing, the excerpt becomes a choreographed moment, punctuated by the repetition of the scene. All the meaning of the documentary is destroyed as it turns into an absurd and excessively repetitive dance. The result, entitled *La Danse de Saint-Guy* (“Saint Guy’s Dance”) in reference to the patron saint of epileptics and people sick with chorea, falls in line with the artist’s practice of taking things out of their context, emphasising that which is suggested but cannot be seen and creating artificial tensions by using light narrative devices.

In his article, *What Art does to the archive*, Christophe Kihm<sup>1</sup> explains that for Jacques Derrida the archive has a paradoxical relationship to loss, trace and inscription. The relationship can be found in Pitoiset’s sound installation *Je ne me souviens plus de l’été dernier* (“I don’t remember last summer”). Here Emile Pitoiset makes a sound edit of *Last Year at Marienbad*, the Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet film based

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<sup>1</sup> Christophe Kihm, “Ce que l’art fait à l’archive” (What art does to the archive), *Critique*, 759 – 760, August – September 2010

on a love story. The acetate disc employed in this installation deteriorates through use. With this work the artist takes the viewer into the strange and captivating cinematographical space of Alain Resnais's film. Mapping our imagination, a finished story begins again and again. This is why what seems to be repeating itself identically is actually brimming with tiny differences that make every "return" an event that is always new and irreconcilable with what happened before<sup>2</sup>. Is the work of art the only thing that does not suffer from repetition? Symmetry and repetition are the principles that inform much of Emilie Pitoiset's work. In *Faire Retour aux choses mêmes* ("Return to the things themselves"), an excerpt of *Alphaville* by Godard questions the intentions of the actors. Are they dancing to seduce or performing a piece of choreography? The artist again casts doubt upon the purpose of the images or their truth, with a rhetorical question: how can we make images lie?

*L'ordinaire de la multitude*, I have seen that before, Ordinary experience. In some of the titles of Emilie Pitoiset's exhibitions and work, artifice, the trivial, the pathetic, seem to dominate the reflexion more than the new or the original. She seems to be more interested in sublimating the banal than the original. With a certain simplicity of shape and means and a sober content, Modernism, Bauhaus, and the pattern on the grill seem to become the spectral and poetical figures of her plastic research. Using pre existing photographic resources, the artist uses a composition based on oblique lines thus giving structure to images that would otherwise be out of balance. Broadly speaking all her work expresses the idea of a movement, of an action, even when they are still because they are pictures or when they are simply objects in space. Thus with *Jalousie* (also the title of a novel by Robbe-Grillet) Emilie defies the law of gravity to the point of suggesting a certain danger for the viewer. The artist flirts with the moment when balance can break. But isn't the Fall at the heart of all representations of the world? In her essay *The Art of Falling* Elisabeth Wetterwald<sup>3</sup> states that a certain number of artists experiment with gravity, not to defy or escape it, but to abandon themselves to it, without resistance. The two videos *Faire retour aux choses même* and *Liebe ist kalter als der Tod* express this instability, sculpturally, at the point of rupture, the moment when balance is lost, and once more, the effect is reminiscent of the world of dance. In pursuit of her attempt to make space behave in a geometric manner, Emilie refers to a conception of modern dance associated with the Bauhaus movement through the work of pioneer Oskar Schlemmer. As early as the 1920s, in his unique and visionary project, he defined the body as a vector (of knowledge) and antenna of interrogation on the world and history<sup>4</sup>. In Schlemmer's work the body becomes simultaneously memory and rupture. Dance is both a search for balance and its negation. Its foundation lies in walking, as it is a repetition of a binary pattern: the body falls forwards then immediately regains balance, then falls again, and so on.

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<sup>2</sup> On his own work artist Benoît Maire likes to repeat: "Every time you look at a work of art you see it again."

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth Wetterwald, "L'art de la chute" (The Art of falling), in *Parachute* magazine, n°101, 2001, Montreal

<sup>4</sup> Laurence Louppe, "Les danses du Bauhaus, une généalogie de la Modernité" (Bauhaus dances, A Genealogy of Modernism) in *Oskar Schlemmer*, RMN, 1999, Paris.

In the catalogue of the exhibition *La Grande Parade*, Jean Clair wrote that in Ancient Times acrobatics were often linked to funeral ceremonies. To this day, numerous circus acts conjure death while miming an apparent birth. The *Othello* performance video seems to resonate strangely with the dark and tormented world of the circus. *Othello* looks like a strange and cruel dream where a horse, threatened with a pistol, poses and lies down. If for the viewer this image is as incongruous as it is uncomfortable, for the horse the threat is, of course, abstract. Again the artist considerably displaces the stakes of representation to create a feeling of awe. The fun fair, like the circus, becomes a potentially dangerous place in Emilie's universe. *Just Because Just Because* is a collection of pictures of people taken at the moment they hit the target at fairground target-shooting stands. Seeing these playful and heroic moments immortalised, the viewer cannot help feeling that he has become the target of a latent danger. *Just Because* is also reminiscent of the movie *Entr'acte* (1924) by Jean Clair. Picabia and Satie pointed their shotgun towards the viewers of the theatre where the film was first screened. Reminiscence of the absurd Dadaist spirit and the revelation of a mad world, the avant-garde never ceases to come back, even in the work of this young artist.

Thus, in Emilie Pitoiset's work the universe of the slaughterhouse, fun fair and circus coexists with Schlemmer's triadic ballets, the cinema of Resnais and Jean Clair and Robbe Grillet's literature. By refusing divisions and barriers and mixing codes it contrives to conjure images of death and fate. The malformed bird *Handy*, a white horse that looks dead, Pitoiset's monochromatic world is simultaneously claustrophobic and open, a world where freedom is constantly reinvented.

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