

■ project photography

Igor Ustinov, Marshall Vernet

Due Complementari

Marshall Vernet and Igor Ustinov will be exhibited together on this occasion, which allows us to view their work as a whole, not in the sense of collaborative pieces but rather as closely related in terms of the relationship between the background and the figure, which has governed perspective representation in painting for centuries. As we know, it is precisely this relationship that was transgressed by the artistic avantgarde, from Impressionism to Abstract Expressionism and beyond, and then consciously brought back into discussion in order to be recovered in critical terms. Not that I think these two artists are part of this debate, but rather that their presence in the same space calls it to mind.

Let us look a little closer. During his various pilgrimages around the world in search of locations to photograph for cinema, Marshall Vernet developed a taste for landscape photography that has transferred to his independent work, which is exhibited here. In highly contrasting black and white, the artist wishes to emphasise the structure in every panorama, the skeleton of construction in each image: geometry highlighted by the mechanical eye in frontal views or shown close-up. To better reveal the architectural structure, and this does not apply solely to buildings, but especially to natural landscapes. The central perspective from which he captures the parallel lines of trees in *Palais Royal Light*, the horizontal framing of the landscape in *Lauenensee* and even the tangle of climbing branches along the wall in *Vines* are no less peremptory than the zig-zagging of the monumental staircase in *Flow* or the mighty pillars in *Colonnata*. By capturing the landscape or details of a building, Vernet reveals the depth of his visual culture (*Capri Horizon* resembles a homage to Piero Della Francesca in the simplicity of its frontal perspective), which compels him to organise his images according to classic perspective coordinates (including codifications and transgressions) or to find structural symmetry in places where we might not expect it, such as the *Due Palme*, almost invisible to the sides of Santa Cecilia in Rome. In other words, Vernet rationalises the view, and in this sense recalls Daniel Buren when he states that seeing is already thinking, it is a selective act of thought.

This applies to the background, since there are very few figures, apart from the odd rare case (the two clergymen, once more in Rome), in Vernet's photography. They are however present in the work of Igor Ustinov, son of the great actor Peter Ustinov, who perhaps passed on his taste for an emphatic gesture, a pose, or something of the theatrical air that Igor's work preserves. Human, or rather anthropomorphic, figures, with abstract faces yet eloquent and extremely significant poses, given that they are always shown in powerful movement, never static (if they are static, if the figures are shown on strange pedestals, they are called *Sentinelles* and are awaiting something). Even small sculptures seem ready to become monuments in public spaces: climbing up the walls, about to jump from a bridge, or even seeming to take flight and emanating obvious physicality. Human bodies assuming the positions of tightrope walkers, or dancers in an almost impossible pas de deux, figures precariously balanced over large circles (*Variations sur le cercle*, a thematic cycle) or spheres, or standing on one foot above a vertical pile of heavy cubes. Then there are titles such as *Ivresse* or *Toujours plus haut*, and if a sculpture is called *Racines*, it is because we see two standing figures intertwined over a linear tangle, a whole that evokes anything but putting down roots and stability.

Highly structured and precise scenarios then, of strong and inextricable presence, and fluid aerial figures, almost improbable in their daring positions. The two elements, the two dimensions, that traditionally construct the picture, and the psychological vision of the painting itself even before that, engage in a duet between different artists in an intriguing game of parts. Strongly defined backgrounds, highly elusive figures; static on the one hand, dynamic on the other, it seems that they take meaning from the other in a dialectic that cannot help but intrigue the spectator.