

ADDING JUST A FEW LINES

Interview by Madelon Fleminger

Tell me about your underpinnings. The whole story began with music. I mean the first things I wrote in my drawings when I was a student were quotes from Sonic Youth songs. Music has always been with me and still is. I can't work in silence. Music inspires, guides and influences me, not only in terms of energy, but also in forthrightness. «I can feel it in my bones...» on "Sister", I think this was the first quote. **At a certain point you began using lines that seem to indicate spatial delineation in a way that perhaps offers the viewer more orientation. How did this develop in your canvas paintings?** It started smoothly and spontaneously, though I think it was actually quite a logical process. I'd been stuck in my studio for months, intently focused and introverted, yet blocked inside, during a very long winter. One day, I started to draw perspectives and lines on a canvas, trying to define a space for an installation inside the painting. Because doing installations is quite the opposite: being outside, together with people, and in a much more extroverted state. Although my paintings were more abstract before, I think I've always dealt with space, perspective and depth. I just added a few lines this time. I also liked very much to paint life-size work with life-size doors, for example, as if the viewer could actually open the door in the painting himself, and enter. **And how did the flags enter your latest paintings?** My flags are full of "Je m'en fous" (I don't care) in soft pencil, and it makes me laugh. I once drew a space with perspectives on my canvas and something was missing. I also wanted to become 'clearer' about the kind of space it was. This reminded me of a song by Björk, "Declare independence", where she says: "Make your own flag...raise your flag...". I liked this idea, it's such a strong symbol! My flags always float vigorously in the wind, where they are planted, somewhere in space, or like the image of the U.S. flag on the moon in 1969. I mean I could never draw a down or torn flag of "je m'en fous", it would be a nonsense! **Why?** With my flags, in these paintings I show I have won: just there, just once. And once in a while, while you sometimes feel that you lose everywhere in real life, to win at least somewhere is very refreshing... I mean it's the privilege of the creator, isn't it? I read Francis Bacon's interviews and it really changed me. He was so critical, so sincere and true, facing who he was but also seeming to be always in conflict – which generates tension. He once said something about the willpower to make

oneself completely free. And then he added that willpower is the wrong word because we could call it despair. For me this is a truth. And as I'm looking for liberation, I guess I try to express all this in those patterns of continuous, countless, irrepressible approach, like a loop, like a skipping record. By a shift of perspective and some openness of mind, failure is turned into something full of possibilities, rather than something fatal and full of pressure. By not openly embracing failure, you can hardly be open to something truly new. Failure is also about the human compulsion to strive for improvement despite the knowledge that perfection is unattainable. **How do you think about installations?** I like to paint reality, the real world itself, in a very direct sense. And I love the idea of being 'out of the frame', investing art in the everyday lives of people. I sometimes have the feeling that cities are very impersonal, that they are, for various reasons, limited to a 'lieu de passage'. I still have in mind what Guy Debord once wrote: "What changes our way to see the streets is more important than what changes our way to see painting." I'm always trying to be as tangible as possible. So for the installations, the promenade ideally finds himself inside of the work, which is inscribed in his everyday world. I like the idea that the installation returns some sort of feedback or resonance, and the effect of resonance in my installations stems from a contrast of different logic and rationalities: those of architecture, statics, stability and function, and those of the world of art. **You work with fluorescent paint, which was developed about 60 years ago. For quite some time, it has been criticized in the art world for being a cheap trick to gain attraction. They've become an ordinary element of contemporary culture, but they have this utopian side to them. Fluorescent colors speak about the moment, the present, the devastation of a romantic idyll. They are more than colors because they transform invisible energy into visible light; they allow more of themselves to be seen than just colour. Today I'm interested in the confrontation between these colors and the more classical ones, because it's so difficult, but also very joyful, to find a balance. As Esther Leslie and Ben Watson say in Dot Dot Dot, fluorescent colors are a «twist on the volume control». And I think this metaphor is absolutely appropriate.**