
Buren and the Last of the End of the 20th Century Avant-gardes

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Daniel Buren : cabanes éclatées 1975-2000, catalogue raisonné thématique vol. 2, Le Bourget : Ed. 11/28/48, 2000

Daniel Buren : catalogue raisonné chronologique tome II, 1964-1966, Le Bourget : Ed. 11/28/48 ; Villeneuve d'Ascq : Musée d'art moderne Lille Métropole, 2000

Many Colored Objects placed side by side to form a Row of Many Colored Objects, Luxembourg : Casino Luxembourg, 2000

- 1 An open letter from the hereafter, signed by Michel Parmentier, written with Daniel Buren's ink, and distributed in January 2001, revealed to all its recipients the extent to which the crisis suffered by a couple of dozen artists *circa* 1965, in Paris, left scars which are still perceptible today. Involved was a recent piece by Daniel Dezeuze about Michel Parmentier. Ever vigilant and virulent as ever, Buren gave him a piece of his mind in as decisive a way as in previous missives¹. So the publication of the first two volumes of the Daniel Buren *catalogue raisonné* could not fail to attract the attention of any reader inquisitive about such a sensitive subject. We all know that any publication of this type is not only a marketing plus but also an opportunity to discover what the ups and downs of a career have not always made it possible to present publicly. The two volumes edited by Annick Boisnard, under Daniel Buren's direct supervision, fulfil these two functions. They cover two aspects of Daniel Buren's work that are "catalogable", in other words made up of independent pieces like the paintings of the 1964/1966 period and the "*cabanes éclatées* /exploded huts", produced between 1975/2000.

- 2 Roger Chastel's studio, at the School of Fine Arts in Paris, would see passing through it, in just a few years, artists like Parmentier (1961), Rouan and Buraglio (1963), and Viallat and Bioulès (1963), as well as Kermarrec, Dufo, and one or two others, including a certain Daniel Meyer de Buren. Like other painters with their sights set on a professional career, this latter would take part in salons (Grands et jeunes d'aujourd'hui; Salon de la jeune peinture), and compete for prizes (Lefranc). For a young painter, Paris is not an unwelcoming city; it rewards and exhibits those who wish to make a mark. So, in Paris, you can see many exhibitions which mix active artists, and artists who are respected at the School of Fine Arts, as well as masters who came to the fore in the early years of the 20th century, such as Picasso and Matisse. These were models whom Buren sought to meet and imitate, just like certain American artists such as De Kooning and Siqueiros, the Mexican muralist. Other works are present, and other ideas are expounded which are not immediately perceived with the keenness with which the later development of things gratifies us today. Christian Besson thus tells a step-by-step tale which introduces all the leading players of a world in which the character who would become Daniel Buren also evolved; with the same attentiveness, he moves across the surface of canvases and other paintings and collages, some 340 items of which (including a very large number not hitherto published or seen) are listed and reproduced in volume II of the *Catalogue raisonné chronologique, 1964-1966*. This story is not a Manichean one. It does not turn Buren into a hero, but, quite to the contrary, shows him in a world where several art worlds mingle, turn by turn or concurrently summoning an inquisitive mind and a real painter still in his apprenticeship. The crisis that afflicted the Paris art market, whose death throes have been described for us, shortly after 1960 did not seem to affect young artists. The institutional dramas ushered in by the rejection of the IVth Republic's paternalism, at the instigation of Malraux, were played out in an arena well-removed from the conspiracies of the Salon de la jeune peinture. Buren, Parmentier and the others looked on, painted, exhibited, read, and travelled, until the various positions took up radical stances and the project was hatched to form a foursome (Buren, Mosset, Parmentier and Toroni) and exhibit paintings which were then breaking with the *milieu* that had nurtured them. Although Christian Besson's goal is not to pen the history of a whole generation, the month-by-month, painting-by-painting itinerary of Daniel Buren's training and activities unfailingly introduces the other characters met *en route*, ideas discussed, works seen and assimilated, as well as works appraised without any immediate reaction, and the whys and wherefores of what was topical in the art scene. This itinerary is an exemplary one, because Buren responded to Christian Besson's tireless curiosity, and because Besson has managed to find the right approach, which is both dispassionate and extremely interesting. He has also managed to conduct complementary investigations and hark back to documents dating from the early 1960s. In the wake of the interminable interviews already granted over the past 15 years or so, we still learn other things and, in particular, we grasp the unheralded shift which leads to rupture, with the weighty ideas and the hurried slowness of the artist's work. In the end of the day, Buren would be in a position to join a small group of international artists with whom he would certainly not have hobnobbed, had it not been for his curiosity and mobility.
- 3 I won't deign to compare Besson's essay with the text written by Alexander Alberro and Nora M. Alter which prefaces the volume *Cabanes éclatées 1975–2000*. This latter reminds us how the first hut is an indirect consequence of the construction of a new museum at Moenchengladbach involving the transportable recreation of a room in the old museum

in which, at the prompting of Johannes Cladders, Buren produced one of his most important in situ works. Besson's text is actually too atypical, in terms of its aim, in terms of what it deals with and the modesty of its writing, just as it is atypical in terms of its scope. It should help us to rethink the whole of the period which preceded the formation of an international *micro milieu*, made up of a handful of galleries, a clutch of curators running museums and art centres, and a fairly small phalanx of critics supporting what are conventionally known as Minimal Art, Conceptual Art, and Arte Povera. This world, which came into being in the early 1970s, also had its collectors. Like Annick and Anton Herbert, they asserted the radical stamp of their choices and did not yield to the commercial and tourist-like frenzy which hallmarked the latter years of the 20th century. In his foreword to the catalogue produced by Yves Gevaert for the presentation of their collection at Casino (Luxembourg), Jan Debbaut emphasizes the probable swansong of this world today, and the end of the period of development. This collection, which includes outstanding works of Conceptual Art and Arte Povera, started with Broodthaers, and is an act of faith. Without any fanfare, the catalogue reproduces the works, the statements and the certificates attaching to them; and that's that. A pure aesthetic reality whose destiny is still open to a slow and attentive approach. It attests to the world in which Buren undeniably took up his place in the 1970s, but from which he has moved away, so as not to cold-shoulder the public in the street and the major cultural institutions which he is also good at wooing.

NOTES

1. See the "little Parmentier compilation" published by the review *Fusées* (n°4, 2000, Auvers sur Oise : édition Carte Blanche) in which Daniel Dezeuze contributes a small piece about Michel Parmentier.