

## **The Scout and the Hunter.**

*On the art of decoy in Christine Laquet's oeuvre*

There are several ways of approaching the work of Christine Laquet. One possible interpretation might focus on the artefacts and perhaps more specifically on the instruments employed by the artist which all, in their own way, pertain to some form of archaic or modern science. The aims of this science – capture and proof – are given a new slant here to provide a glimpse or inkling of a specific moment, a threshold of emergence.

The artist invites us to a narrative of anticipation whose central figure would seem to be closer to the scout than the hunter. Imagining a narrative and looking at the speculative dimension of this work involves a circulatory movement between the artefacts, as the works take on the characteristics of an underlying history overriding their physical presence, and the exhibition alternates between fable and archaeology.

One of this work's most intriguing strains is therefore its inferred relationship to objects, in that they are both crafted purposely for outright seduction and yet placed across our path as the intercessors – “scout-objects” – of an invisible world. In this respect, in conjunction with their *techne* – and the “functionalisation” of the modern object – they express a symbolic and archaic idiom reminiscent of the interwoven nature of the practices of hunting and magic. This twofold formula or dual “function” is no doubt what makes Christine Laquet's work a disconcerting territory in which two forces are grappling with one another within modernity; they are two rival forces in the search to grasp Reality – ritual and science.

With this dual functionality in mind, we could say that Christine Laquet's work comes under hunting – in the broad sense of this ritual. It therefore needs to be seen in an ecological context removed from Western perspectives, calling into question the centrality of man in Nature and by extension, the relationship between hunter and hunted because everything here points to capture requiring transformation, *becoming something else*. This expansion of the perceptible world – as implied in particular in her shamanic references in the performance “You should never forget the jungle” and more tenuously in the video “Tir de nuit” (Night Shot) – here too comes up against a form of dystopian reduction. The photograph “Vanité” (Vanity) reveals a monitoring device hidden in a bucolic setting. Observation operates in a loop. Man looks at himself looking at himself. It is the final stage in the paradox of a measurement that takes only the observer into account and dismisses the very subject of the experiment. A man who manages to exert such control over his environment appropriates it in such a radical way that he creates *a science of self*; the refrain on the gate that opens the exhibition – “a brief history of everything” – may therefore be taken specifically as “a brief history of you”.

It is this balancing effect that the artist invites us to discover. It is an effect of being suspended between two magnetic fields, with a hanging knife in a movement that alternates between allowing things to emerge, an art of receiving the world in the self – “a brief history of everything” – and conversely a desire to take and control, of projecting oneself on the world – “a brief history of you”. Language is therefore to be used both to

designate and to slide meaning into a ritual of transformation as Lacanian as it is shamanic. The painted images are to be exhibited as trophies but also as wishes, dreams and the rupestral idiom of communication between species.

Christine Laquet's exhibition opens with one of these paradoxical hunting instruments. A scout-object that plays this menacing music of seduction to perfection. In the bright lobby, a giant fishing rod bends silently above our heads. Adorning its hook is a colourful decoy whose novelty offers a cheery contrast to the intriguing aspect of this arsenal. It is a form of welcome or introduction. But it is also the simple statement of another active ingredient in Christine Laquet's work. Rather than being associated with its catch – like fishermen photographed standing alongside their fish – here the instrument is often left to its own devices, faced with its apparent solitude, its own weight and its own (dis-) proportions. Yet it stands removed from both the ready-made and the eco-museum through a play on scale and material that somewhat obscures its literal citation. We are in the presence of sorts, in the sense of *a sort of fishing rod, a sort of swing or gate*. The immediate question posed by the artist is one of presence, orchestrating instruments of capture that are also instruments of anticipation, tools of the art of "*what is coming*". Hence a certain taste for suspended forms – a knife, a swing – which have nothing lightweight about them as they suggest that something may happen, hovering from the outset above our heads like a threat that never leaves us, a narrative of possibilities, "a history of everything". It is a history on two accounts: like a return of the past in the present (archaeology) and an art of the future that seeks neither to foresee nor to fix the future (fabulation) – a capture without a catch that distances itself from what Isabelle Stengers calls "futurology". And indeed it is difficult to focus our attention on just the objects exhibited by the artist, on the question of "what is it?" without being able to shake off another equally significant question: "just when is it?" And to see questions related to anthropology – and more specifically to her artefacts in an exhibition context – cropping up again by an unusual twist. Does the object exist outside of its use or the ritual it commands? Is it imbued with magic? Is it a relic or the sharpest sign of whatever will emerge from the shadows? While the artist's use of procedures of scientific photography and video clearly refer to the modern obsession with proof, the moment she calls upon clearly gives her offering a contemporary stance as expressed by Giorgio Agamben. It is a case of "the incessant happening" rather than of "seeing that", in the elasticity of anticipation. This is the instant that is clearly expressed in the film "Tir de nuit" (Night Shot) as it is not so much a matter of seeing the wolf – which is the primary function of the device given a new slant by the artist – but of learning to look at the wolf's absence and the endless variations on this absence. We might enjoy our fill of the glittering gazes of the other forest creatures as they come to delight in rolling in the fresh mud of this bit of woodland, but the work's decisive moment occurs when the screen goes blank, indicating a new threat, when the image adjusts to black – just as the white balance is adjusted when calibrating colour in a daytime shoot. The presence sensor therefore becomes a way of recovering from the blankness, with the new intensity of the black screen that here signifies a tremendously dense range of possibility.

Though the recorded performance “you should never forget the jungle” is a direct staging of two characters – the artist and the performer Robert Stejn – Christine Laquet’s oeuvre as a whole draws on another, this time invisible figure. As we surmised above, provided that its trivial aspects are overlooked, the ritual of hunting sheds light on some aspects of the artist’s work – considering first of all that the tool’s primary function is to act as a decoy and that it is above all an intercessor of what is unseen, a speculative object rather than a measuring instrument or tool of efficiency, or even less of decoration. Here all that is hunted is the famous “what is coming”, what emerges from the shadows. The tool thus defined is not so much related to a hunter as to a scout in the sense implied by the philosopher Didier Debaise when he proposes a new conceptual figure embodying the speculative line: the *speculi*. The scout – meaning he who lies in wait, a boundary figure or visionary entirely dedicated to projection and who is at a loss as soon as the goal is reached: sighting the enemy, which signs his death warrant.

By means of generous works of undeniable visual power, Christine Laquet creates confusion perhaps unobtrusively, plays on the art of decoy and lies in wait like a scout so as to lead us on the trail of this diffuse moment, on the threshold of an inexorable but elusive emergence – that of the instant to come.

Olivier Marboeuf, September 2013