

Ceremony

We sneak into Thomas Lévy-Lasne's *Fêtes* series like prowlers, moving from one room to another, from one body to another, drawn in by the various fragments and objects that inhabit the nights of the binge-drinking generation: white cups filled with dodgy wines, overflowing ashtrays, sodden paper tablecloths, beer cans, candles in plastic holders. In the background, a body, an unreadable face, a standing figure cropped out of the frame so that only a bit of trouser and a jacket can be seen.

Fête No32. Grimy tiles smudged with footprints, bottles of champagne on the floor and a table, four pairs of legs forming the main motif of the watercolor. Our gaze dives towards those legs from a slightly exaggerated perspective. The artist often crops his figures so that any attempt to identify them becomes irrelevant. Lévy-Lasne takes a wicked delight in emphasizing details to achieve maximal realism: for instance reflections on stainless steel or light diffracted by plastic or glass; a delight that springs from the gap between botanist and onanist.



Fête No30. The high-angle view forces us to look down on the scene almost vertically. The floor is sprinkled with confetti; the jeans of the character nearest to us occupy almost a third of the picture. We can make out the fibers, the folds, the seam on the back pocket. Then seven or eight feet, or rather seven or eight shoes and a few body parts, including a girl's calf, sheathed in floral-patterned tights which the artist seems to have observed at length. What is the subject of *Fête No30*? Between the floor, the high-angle view, the confetti, this slightly erotic detail, this calf... "Between", precisely, is how meaning gets in.

Fête No27. The three main figures are turned towards us, faceless and amputated at the knees and shoulders by the edges of the frame. All we see of the seven figures are their clothes; presumably they are talking, holding glasses and cigarettes. The scene could have been shot with a 50 mm lens, a format often used for portraits that makes it difficult to include everything in the frame. Once more no visible faces, fabrics are rendered with such painstaking details they become highly pleasurable to the viewer: for instance, the reflections of rhinestones on a sweatshirt or the geometric print of the shirt worn by a man in the background.



With this type of cropping, any attempt at inventing some kind of psychological back-story for the characters becomes irrelevant. It compresses and includes everything within the frame so that the individuals in the scene, captured through random motifs, fall into some sort of definitive empathy. Within this frame, everything is permissible: the more we look, the more we see large statues or even colossal architecture.

What is Thomas Lévy-Lasne showing us? What does he want to tell us through scenes that feel so intensely déjà-vu or déjà-lived and seem however radically exotic? In fact, their profound oddity comes from the position assigned to the viewer in most cases. The angle seems somehow wrong: too low, too close-up, as though this was the point of view of a child who shouldn't be there (*Fête* 24, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33, for instance), or even of a dog. There is also the fact that the figures' faces are either cropped out or lit, tilted, "closed" in such a way that it is difficult to read their expression, as though the figures themselves were absent from the scene they are meant to inhabit. So that the answer can't be found in the figures or objects featured in the image. After all, what would be the point of assigning "meaning" to a close-up of a bottle of champagne, DJ turntables or two dancing bodies? Unless we consider they are just pretexts.



Perhaps the actual subject of those pictures is the very act of painting watercolors within the small, experimental format Lévy-Lasne selected for this series, no larger than half a magazine page. The artist's achievement here is to establish a watertight perimeter between what is shown and the way the picture is actually produced. Though at first sight the pictures look like photographs "turned into paintings", nothing is unlikelier: on the contrary, they are the product of a complex alchemy of exaggerations, aberrations and slight disproportions in montage.

Ultimately, their point is neither to bear witness to our contemporary lives, nor to pass judgment or even to express a point of view, but rather to "objectify" the contemporary in order to draw our attention to its pictorial properties; our pleasure as viewers is to be at once included in the scenes and alien to them.

And indeed, when looking at this series, viewers act as though they were peering into the window of a candy store: leaning in, looking closer, squinting, taking off their glasses, then turning around with a smug smile, as though they had experienced a minute detail, a slight moment of absence that had snatched the present moment from them.

In the *Fêtes* series, everything is in the details. There is no meaning, just clichés torn from the void, from the tangible. A journey into the superfluous; an outsized importance given to the accessory. As though the true face of our generation in this time of crisis emerged not from social networks but through the magical and inexhaustible exploration of our personal belongings.

Gaël Charbau (2012)

Traduction : Denyse Beaulieu