

# CLAIREGASTAUD

Jean-Charles Eustache  
Texts

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Painting is not an image, it is not useless to remind it because painting is not born from images but from the surface, from the depth, from the light, from the story of a look. The images have a surface but their surface sinks like a ship at the bottom of an ocean. We are helpless sailors under a deluge of images, we no longer see the waves and search in vain for the surf and the swell when we are already drowned at the bottom of the waters. This is probably the reason why it is difficult to look at the works that work to put the images overboard, to build the makeshift rafts of our gaze, to resurface. Jean-Charles Eustache is a painter and, as such, produces no images. His paintings, barely larger than the hand that gave them birth, offer their smooth and absolutely matte surface, absolutely deep, worthy of an Italian primitive devoting an unconditional love to his expanses. Whether they represent situations borrowed from the visible world, whether they are composed by orthonormal grids or whether they fall back on the intensity of a hue contained in an illusionist frame, his paintings are neither figurative nor abstract - if such a dichotomy is worth debating. The «figurative» paintings - let's call them that for convenience - are visions inspired by memories and heady dreams or borrowed from the field of apocalyptic literature, the dark annunciations and epiphanic revelations that strike children and shepherds in religious narratives. Heavens consumed by weak conflagrations, prodigious mounts overhanging a desolate land, telluric uprisings towards the firmament, obscure arches girdling the unholy foliage of cursed provinces: the subjects are finally only the signs of the inexistence of these images in the world. These hallucinated visions vibrate only with a hypothetical reality and reveal the falsification of the images of which they are the recipients. They offer themselves to the gaze like spectres - ghosts and colors - deigning to deliver themselves to those whose eyes know how to read between the lines of mist on gibbous moonlit nights. Simultaneously, paintings of identical formats are composed by a monochrome tint whose flatness is contained within a trompe-l'oeil frame. The beauty of these miniatures is fascinating: I think of Giotto, Fra Angelico, the pink of Piero della Francesca, the blue of Jean Fouquet, the black of Manet. I think of the tactility of the decorative geometric frescoes in grisaille of the Villa Poppaea, near Naples, in the first century. These paintings are not abstract: light settles in, zenithal or projected from the upper left corner, carrying shadows over the edges, delicate and unforgettable like the light of Giorgio Morandi. These surfaces reveal a sense of color, an ability to create an intimate and sensitive space with a little, a little that is not nothing, a little that is capable of expressing the sensation, of concentrating the narrative of the gaze without the slightest narration. In the same way, when the paintings compose meticulously ordered grids, Jean-Charles Eustache gives an account of a time dedicated to the observation of walls and facades caressed by the sunlight. The duration stretched as the sun's flamboyance faded towards its last flickers of candlelight. The light and its modulations slowly revealed the reliefs and hollows of the stone, giving a chalky consistency to the surface, to the hours and to the elusive extinction of the day, making the imperceptible blueness of the stone surface blossom, gradually erasing its light rose pink to be tinted with a vesper color.

Jean-Charles Vergne

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*Drowning is not so pitiful as the attempt to rise.*

Some of Jean-Charles Eustache's paintings, rather small in size (19 x 24 cm), are fleetingly reminiscent of one of those badly preserved postcards, half torn, faded by time, but which we keep because it reminds us nostalgically of those distant and happy holidays in the mountains that we foolishly thought would last forever. But if you really look closely, you realise that it's nothing of the sort: the house, though big and beautiful, seems desolate, abandoned, even haunted. The colours are not faded, but deliberately desaturated. The image has not been torn up, ripped away, but it is caught up in the background: it is the background, as white as the canvas, that 'drips' onto the house, a little to remind us that this is a painting, a lot to distance the subject from its environment, to fragment what could have been a postcard landscape, and to study precisely a perimeter, a zone. Zone after zone, painting after painting, these become floating, the state of the place almost obsessive. The roadside becomes more telling than the direction, the house and its physical reality more relevant than its project, or even its environment, in bearing witness to the state of the socio-cultural dream that this house embodies. When Jean-Charles Eustache (un)paints the aborted construction site of a dream of ownership (the childish *do mi si la do ré*), namely a house so big and so expensive that it was never finished or lived in, it is to underline its vanity, to paint a vanity. to underline its vanity, to paint a vanity. It's not a question of depicting some kind of property mythology, or fantasising about a morbid, gothic world of ghosts and witches, but rather painting a vanity. but to paint a world in decay. Unvarnished reality. Each of these houses is The dreams that built them do not reflect the rough tangibility of our world, The dreams that built them do not reflect the rough tangibility of our world, which has become futile and vain, disintegrating in a gradual, consensual slide.

Thomas David

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A way from elsewhere

Jean-Charles Eustache lives in Clermont-Ferrand but you'd almost think he was American. It's easy to imagine him designing the sets for a Californian suburban TV series, looking for Douglas fir trees in the forests of Montana, drawing plans for a prairie house in Chicago, and so on. forests of Montana, drawing plans for a prairie house in Chicago, scouring the residential areas of Maine residential areas of Maine, photographing the Creole architecture of New Orleans, spotting abandoned drive-ins in Ohio. in Ohio. We can imagine him everywhere, criss-crossing the heart of this country that shines through his his paintings. And strangely enough, if there's one trip that's going to count for him, it's Guadeloupe in 2006, his native country. That year, the motif at home took hold. His aunt took him to see some half-built private housing squatted by illegal workers, "places between two eras, dead skins already bewitched, vanities". 1 The abandoned houses of Pointe-à-Pitre are not so different from those deserted by the crisis in the suburbs. deserted by the crisis in the suburbs of Detroit. On his return, Eustache painted these colonial-style houses the colonial style, destroying their architectural foundations, spreading the drips and blurring the colours. In the In the "Avril" series, he strips the houses down to the footprint of a foundation, a concrete slab on the ground embedded in wild vegetation. When he watches a series or a film, the artist carefully follows the camera's movements, especially at the beginning when it zooms in on the family home and its inhabitants, like the façade, solid and immaculate. and immaculate. Eustache's paintings are often views of the outdoors, and he opts for a frontal, modest framing, a study of the landscape. frontal and modest framing, a case study that does not cross the fence. It is not the action that holds the artist back but the moment of respite after the incident. The plot calms down, yet the setting still exudes conflict. Some of the paintings bear the names of the victims who perished on the premises: Sarah, Rex, Dolores, Paul. Architecture is an emotion that Eustache represents in a latent state. He finds the rural houses of the American regionalist painters of the 1930s, not to mention the English cottage, the choice of colour palette the choice of colour palette, the geometry of the garden, the perfection of the interior layout, a "diabolical precision diabolical precision". Again, Eustache manages to capture the emotional and symbolic load of the places. Gaston Bachelard considered the house, especially the birthplace, as the place of concentration of a significant network of images, memories, dreams. According to him, the house is a vertical being «from the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar». 2 Eustache's houses are, on the contrary, horizontal beings, still imbued with the memory of a travelling shot that passes slowly from the left to the right of the screen scrolls the roadside, the white fence, the garden, the veranda, the kitchen sink, the phone to the leather armchair in the living room. Horizontal beings who do not rise to the sky (always unfinished in his paintings) but follow the eyes riveted to the ground the line of the horizon.

1. Interview with the artist, September 2009.

2. Gaston Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957, p. 35.

Florence Ostend

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Jean-Charles Eustache shows images that slowly fade away. In a disturbing atmosphere, his work is like a trip to all the abandoned places of memory, crossing different universe, such as cinema, the psyche or the intimate. «A sensitive and plastic radiograph of what is hidden buried» (Frédéric Emprou). The artist currently seems possessed by images of haunted houses. His paintings leave the troubled spectator wondering about the provenance or future of these houses, not knowing if they reveal themselves or disappear. Between recovery and discovery, appearance and disappearance. Like mnemonic images or images unconscious of their author. More than a series of houses, the artist paints a world in liquefaction. Jean-Charles Eustache's painting has evolved since his residency in Fontenay in 2005. Attentive and listening to the painting, after multiple attempts, today these are images that are in perfect harmony with his way of seeing things.

Stéphanie Barbon

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A window pane pierced by a bullet impact, an excavation in a floor, a large carpet abandoned wrapped and tied in a vacant lot, a red woman's shoe strayed in the grass, an open cardboard box on a mysterious wrapped object, interior views or landscapes unusual, the paintings of Jean-Charles Eustache are loaded, it is true, with a disturbing atmosphere. The subject addressed in these paintings does not offer anything of event, it would be rather banal (the banal being today a version of the sublime), if it were not charged with an almost criminal gravity. Are they subjects of painting or are they clues that close on the obscure subject of the action of painting? The works intrigues, invites speculation and leads to a hypothetical enigma. This painting, like a safe society, shows a worried look, a suspicious interrogation on the details of everyday life, such as that luggage on an airport treadmill seen through the cold eye of a surveillance camera. The artist speculates on the mundane, introduces a small vice to the mediocre existence, and finds curled up in his memory the subjects of the present images. A mystery is there without being there, such Hitchcock surreptitiously crossing the screen where nothing happens. The scene is skillfully painted that catches the attention towards a closed world, and its light raises an image through a fog of colors pale. Charles Eustache will intrigue with the walks of our imagination, joining the dreamlike universe of the Scottish painter Peter Doig and that of the Argentine artist Fernando X. Gonzalez. The artist undertakes a pictorial research where the painting will trigger a fictional narrative space. It is in its obsessive subjects that lies the essence of the gesture of painting that covers the surface of the painting. In 1976, the painter Gérard Gasiorowski personifies painting by creating its personal myth, a goddess named Kiga. In order to represent her, He began to paint it from a model of a statuette, repeating it a few times before having the surprise of seeing the face of his mother appear. So it is with each index raised and thus framed in the tables we see. It is part of a timeless personal myth whose underlying key belongs to all. The unconscious, as Freud states in *The Science of Dreams*, remains suspended around of a frightening mystery. The painting treats him with a minimum of matter, and in a color chart restrained and serene. The material declines the dark sweetness of its fine, almost photographic grain on that the intermediate light of dawn and morning. The detail, the pattern on which the whole picture always engage in a peaceful atmosphere an unhealthy stumbling block. An invisible force, a little refrain that returns as the painted patterns escape from a universe of silence, and whose noises absent resonate in the speculative wanderings of the mind of each.

Frédéric Bouglé

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## Ghost memories

And if memories were only an accumulation of images, fragments composed and recomposed according to the thread. The work of Jean-Charles Eustache is akin to a peregrination in all the abandoned places of memory. A sensitive and plastic x-ray of what is hidden, buried in an unconscious or an imaginary that the artist tries to bring back. Because he draws from a common reservoir of signs as if from a black box, patterns or specific elements that it reactivates, these then become a bundle of clues, signals: the supports and pretexts for a mental investigation. In the same way that it would be a reconstitution the artist's pieces are the subject and are the place of an investigation; they constitute the point of the beginning of an elucidation that develops into a phenomenon of recognition. Jean-Charles Eustache is thus interested in the particular springs that nourish reminiscences, that make an image remain and remains active, reflective. His works are as many clichés, snapshots questioning this part intimate, this famous disturbing strangeness, the way we are finally inhabited.

Frédéric Emprou

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I would start with a peremptory statement. Jean-Charles Eustache's painting is a painting of the feeling. It is entirely directed towards. Towards nostalgia in its permanent call to remembrance. Towards a melancholy in this report, so well formulated by Jean-Charles Vergne, «of inevitable decay of the choisis<sup>1</sup>». And the list of themes that matter to the artist and that he gives in the interview in this book is eloquent: « the absence, the disappearance, the survival of the memory<sup>2</sup>. That there be a feeling specific to the artist that may be at the origin of a painting, it is conceivable quite well, but can the painting carry this feeling? A feeling of joy, of pain, fullness, terror, etc. There is, of course, the feeling that the painter thinks that his work carries. There is, of course, the feeling that the viewer can project on what he sees, but he is not sure that the two meet. It will be objected that it is rare that one can laugh in front of a canvas of Léon Spilliaert or Caspar David Friedrich and that you can easily delight in a spring Claude Monet or a mimosa by Pierre Bonnard. I am not sure, however, that this is the purpose of painting. I am just certain that it cannot be avoided. Figurative painting, like any image, brings, allows, a feeling, a thing both diffuse and uncertain where it comes from – tone, shape, drawing, composition, etc. – and some painters play more than others – think of Luc Tuymans, for example. For so-called abstract painting, the thing is even more diffuse and we will try to see if a Piet Mondrian or an Ad Reinhardt or a Claude Viallat can bring these projections. I stop this brief conjecture. I deeply believe that the primary impact of painting – and especially that of Jean-Charles Eustache – is of the order of affect. I was suffocated in Niaux, when the lamps were lit and I saw the black bison as if levitating on the walls of the cave, as I experienced the sadness that Giotto must have felt when performing The Kiss of Judas in Padua. I felt all the perfection mystic of Piero della Francesca in front of the Sacred Conversation of Milan as I received full force the enjoyment Bonnard's tender by seeing the mosaic explosion of the Nu in the bath of the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris. And this in the total ignorance of the one who worked – not painting, I hope. I know that it is not not that we talk about art, painting, and that it does not theoretically enlighten our subject, the subject, but it is true that I have nothing to say about, nothing to write about, the painting of Giorgio Morandi, any more than I will be able to any eloquence in front of a Cézanne or a Mondrian, if not to attach me to their writings, to reinject from the history of art, to avoid the subject, constantly, to avoid any direct confrontation with. So, we must start again, search in wandering, in endless walking in exhibitions, museums, art center, what will happen, this unintelligible which passes through the surface and which will constitute the beginning of an autonomous world, this affect which emanates from, both the work and what I'm going to project into it. There are two common expressions for this: "it touches me" and "it Talk to me." You can laugh at me, but that's the point. Not that we're emotional – it's a small matter that only concerns us – but that communication takes place, that painting produces that melting point where my little affect meets the affect world of a painter. I don't like Vermeer because he reminds me of the windows at my grandmother, but I meet him because I've never seen this light except in his paintings and I can to project what I had seen, but not grasped, before this meeting. It happens there, in this place. The world becomes an echo of painting – we know it and Proust has already written it – and painting becomes the transfiguration, its most deposition elevated where the completed deposition, concrete, on its surface, which makes block, absolute concreteness. It is not an image. This is no longer an image. It is an affected surface, innervated with affects – mine, those of the painter. This is our condition modern, our



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condition as heirs of the modern, not to seek to understand, but to seek absolutely to grasp, to catch, this affect-surface in which there is only to see. This provides the image but only after the fact. The image will then be modulation-monet, extinction-vuillard, éclat-matisse, débordement-picasso... affects transposed in all their paintings, whatever the subject. This is why Nicolas Poussin – one of the greatest, we know it – we is difficult to access, is not identifiable to us, so foreign to our modern condition. No affect in him, on the contrary, the maximum distance, all intellectually pictorial; what will not be Rembrandt or Goya or Turner. We knows little of Poussin's word. It must be remembered: «and from all this it appears clearly that beauty is distant of the matter of the body, to which it approaches, if it is not disposed thereof by incorporeal preparations." Paint any idea – but in paint, always. We will understand. The surface of the paint is what affects the image If Peter de Hoogh presents the same images as Vermeer, his surface is not affected by the same It is poor in pictorial affects – think of Rembrandt's highlights, Turner's bleached yellows, and Morandi's trembling grey ripple. It's not stylistic, it's not rhetoric. It's not a particular touch that would be only an autograph sign of biological nature, uncontrollable, executed despite. The pictorial surface affects the image. The surface is the affect. In Jean-Charles Eustache's works of 2007- 2009, the surface, its coiled wrappings, its whites that nibble on the image – disfiguring it – its irruptions mottling or iridescent spots affect a subject, in short, quite banal, not very spectacular most of the time anecdotal for us spectators. The image is a surface. We know this, but this surface is forgotten in and through the image. It is not a matter of illusion, it is simply that she is absent to allow the image – whether painted or not. The 2013 Walls make it exist both, at the same time, at the same level. In Wall 1, a striped rectangle, like a detail of a painting by Agnes Martin who would have landed in the landscape, spreading only its vibratory surface. The caricature of a house in Mur 3 poses the modulation of the enclosed color in its geometry as the only force of painting – and I see an echo of Red house<sup>7</sup> of Kazimir Malevich against trees to the Raoul de Keyser in the evidence of the visible. And the following paintings: 4 Lines or 5 Lines are the radicalization of this pictorial evidence. If 4 Lines is, by its composition, strictly a still life that could evoke Giorgio Morandi, it escapes the genre as much as to its subject with only a skeleton, which will be totally hollowed out in Piece. It does not seem to me, however, that it is only a reduction to the essential structuring of a genre painting – to which, moreover, Aera or WR escape –, but rather deconstruct. In this WR is emblematic and constitutes a possible summary of a poetics – she is not poetics, she is poetics. We will think about this verse by Marcelin Pleyne: " The back wall is a wall of lime" where the verse makes the image appear in all its nudity, stony in the evidence. The clarity of the verse causes the presence. Suddenly we see. But literature is not painting. In the case of Jean-Charles Eustache, the presence comes from the fact that the image is obliterated and becomes only surfaces while remaining at minima image, its little which resists but cannot make forget its surface, which still causes it. The paintings siglé A (A1 to A30) are almost still images – as indicated by the small relief illusions given by a light imaginary coming from the upper left corner. Just as they repeat the modernist scheme of painting abstract by repeating the grid. In a famous text, Rosalind Krauss says of this grid: «Spatially, the grid affirms the autonomy of art. Two-dimensional, geometric, orderly, it is anti-natural, anti-mimetic and goes to the opposite of the real (...). The grid is the way to repress the dimensions of the real and replace them with the deployment of a single surface. By the whole regularity of its organization, it is the result not of imitation but an aesthetic decree (...)

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The grid proclaims that the space of art is both autonomous and autotelic." and autonomous: the painting of Jean-Charles Eustache stands between the two, permanently, bi and three-dimensional, image and surface or, rather, image of a surface, frontal, both dry in its organization and trembling in its tone, a tone often unique but modulated, unstable, where the presence of the hand is constantly revealed in the gesture of apposition. They are both dry and sensual. They synthesize order and hazard. I do not can, however, reduce this painting to a system of resolution of antinomies, to a rule wisely applied in a conceptual/sensitive balance. There is something that escapes me, when I am facing that I am trying to define their issue. The frontality they offer, the reduction of depth, the organization readable rhythmic, chromatic reduction... there is an insistence on exhaustion, in an orderly and grave. These works no doubt echo 17th-century painting. I think of the window in the upper part of La Vocation de saint Mathieu<sup>9</sup> du Caravage, as well as some paintings by Philippe de Champaigne, like the still life of the skull<sup>10</sup> or the frame in the Portrait of Robert Arnauld of Andilly<sup>11</sup>. A window or the plane of a table against the bottom: it is a question of framing, of segmenting the colored planes, of reintroducing an order to the color, to introduce us by organizing it to the opacity of the pictorial surface. There is nothing but the surface, its strange power of fascination, «that, in oblivion closed by the frame, settles,<sup>12</sup>», ultimate plan where the hollowed out image no longer leaves that beyond any feeling and anecdote, in the singular assignment of this small wall.

Eric Suchère