

CLAIRE GASTAUD

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GEOGRAPHY *Cristophe Wlaeminck, 2022*

For a topology of lies: the spectacle of war, the audacity of the polemicist.

More than a painter of history, Alain Josseau is the painter of an information that contributes itself to the construction of history.

Alain Josseau is undoubtedly a painter of history, but of a misused history, constantly rewritten, with no more real density than the actions that led to its construction, to give it interest for the future.

Before being a history painter, Alain Josseau is a polemologist; he is constantly interested in the conditions of informative elaboration of wars, on the part of states as well as the media.

As an informed sociologist, he relates the way in which we perceive information through different plastic means (charcoal, watercolor, painting, installation, video...). It is everywhere, it floods our lives, it overwhelms us. Once upon a time, it was considered reliable, no one questioned the 8 o'clock news... Because of «fake news», misappropriation of meaning, conflicts of interest, insider trading, the fourth estate is reshaping what will make history. But Alain Josseau is watching. He deconstructs in painting everything that is imposed on us as truth.

In the Geographers (#47 to 62, ink and watercolor on paper, 105x75 cm, 2021-2022), the protocol is immutable; it is part of the artist's approach. The series is constituted from a period iconographic background, gleaned through research on the net and elsewhere. Raw or reconfigured in a complex montage according to the scenographic needs, these documents are then processed on computer to serve as a model for the realization of large watercolor drawings. Each watercolor shows a stopped action, characters focused on a map describing war zones. Sometimes the map serves as a backdrop for the protagonists' negotiations. This map of territories is the real subject of the Geographers series: where the fate of the world is played out, the ostentatious sign of interference or belligerence.

Each watercolor in the series deals with strategic plans: «geography is first and foremost used to make war» (Yves Lacoste, *La Découverte*, 1976). These war games become harmless images under the artist's brush.

Alain Josseau appeals to the warlike impulses of childhood. He recomposes the historical fact by letting us think that the characters described in his drawings are players who are having fun with humanity, deciding the fate of all for fake; as in «Risk® - the conquest of the world». We are reminded of the images illustrating the lids of our game boxes, in our childhood... The illustrative dimension of the Geographers series attempts to mitigate the impact of decision-makers on the real world. It invites the viewer to make the part of things, between fiction and reality.

It is fiction, dreams and inventiveness that generate reality, that make it possible. When the latter is deviated, the future is compromised.

Photography, as a medium, is the guarantor of reality for most of us; it has been, it has happened, it is a fact that has become historical... Watercolor, on the other hand, is turned towards fiction, since it belongs to the

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categories of representation. What can we say about a watercolor whose model is an official photograph published in the media? The distance imposed by the representation (watercolor) drawn from facts having existed (photography) makes us doubt the reality of the said facts. It is the victors who write history... In the past, we have seen famous photographs made up to erase a fallen dignitary. Of the photograph or of the watercolor, which tells the truth? The artist could have simply «photoshopped» the historical reality that we are given to see as the unquestionable truth. The watercolor, at this level, is not more false than the photograph. It simply reflects the lie contained in its model. Nothing is more certain than the lie... It is likely that, in a few years, we will take the scenographic series of Geographers for a verified and absolute truth.

Directly inspired by Géographes #35 (2017), War rug (installation, variable dimensions, 2022) is presented in the exhibition space rolled up on a gantry, and measures no less than 2 meters by 7, once unrolled. This rug is based on the technique used to make the staff maps assembled by the resistance fighters of the R.A.F., the British «Coastal Command» organization between 1939 and 1945. Made of various fabrics, sewn in relief to indicate the topography of targeted sites on burlap, this staff map was intended to withstand the maritime conditions of the landing. Alain Josseau's map, also handmade, offers us a fake playground even in its referents. On one side we see CENZUB, the training camp in the urban area of Sissonne in the Aisne, and on the other, CAMP LEJEUNE, the one that looks like an Afghan village in North Carolina. These two training camps simulate war as in a «laser game®» between colleagues, or a game of «Call of duty®» (see the artist's edifying documentary: Guerre Alphatest).

With disconcerting ease, Alain Josseau switches from watercolor to colored pencil. In Time surface #15 (pencil on paper, 5 frames of 105x75 cm), the artist builds a plastic device bringing back on the same plan all the American contemporary history, on a synecdochic mode. This illustration of the world's command center also uses archival images. But here, geography gives way to geopolitics. Without respect for chronology, we discover all the presidents since Roosevelt posing in the Oval Office, busy or discussing with each other: Bush Sr. with Reagan, Nixon with Johnson and Kennedy, Reagan even appears three times... Relativity, restricted and intertwined, is gathered in 105 on 375 centimeters. The artist resumes the conception of the montage of reassembled images as for the Geographers.

Often used in connection with remarkable films of Hollywood cinema, the principle of Time Surface (where the diegesis, the time of the filmic narrative, is redefined as a concatenation of moments reported on a single image), is applied here to the presidency of the USA. Is politics part of the world of entertainment? The media have sold it to us as such for generations. Trump is not the only entertainer to have run for the highest office in the world.

Alain Josseau denounces the lack of critical distance of the current media. We are shown information in a scripted way, with the aim of seeking effects: to shock and keep the audience, «breaking news all over». We covet fear on purpose. It is no longer a question of proposing a reflection on the information, but to feed the appetite of the common people by means of the immediacy of the showable. The news delivers its show. The information passes by the image, it needs to be illustrated. Reality becomes illustrative, it makes a spectacle of itself and by this means, becomes fiction. It annihilates itself, it compromises itself. In that,

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the «virtual reality» is the biggest paradox. When reality is made up, staged, it stops being what it really is and becomes a simulacrum.

To glimpse Alain Josseau's work through the prism of the critique of reality is to see the image appear more real than the reality taken as an example. What is shown is only the manipulation of the scripted reality. According to Jean Baudrillard (*La guerre du golf n'a pas eu lieu*, Gallilée, 1991): «the simulacrum is never what hides the truth because it is the truth that hides that there is none. The simulacrum is true». Alain Josseau appropriates what is served to us as a historical reality, with the aim of indexing the truth in what remains to be perceived there; its very simulacrum. The artist denounces the deception, the falsification of the reality, by integrating it within the plastic device. As Paul Virilio says (*Ce qui arrive*, Fondation Cartier, 2002): «we are victims of the speed of information that sweeps away another in the second that follows. The collective amnesia caused by ultra-fast information goes so far as to establish the dictatorship of emotion. Still according to Paul Virilio: «history requires time to be constructed 'honestly'. But this time for reflection is annihilated by the influx of often contradictory information. The acceleration of history has given way to instantaneousness: to gain time is to lose the world. Another observation: the informative image is replaced by live video. Paul Virilio reminds us that during the first Gulf War, soldiers put down their weapons and surrendered to drones...

Videocracy has replaced war as it was conceived a few decades ago. With the installation *G255 #2* (video installation/model, variable dimensions, 2022), named after the reference of the green used for the television inlays, Alain Josseau demonstrates that one can produce «fake news», propagandist or revisionist, with little material. Like the one shown at the EDF Foundation (2021), this second installation reveals a whole mechanism for producing an authentically false war report. It consists of a cardboard model representing the ruined buildings of a neighborhood in Mosul. Placed on a slowly rotating disk, this model is filmed in real time. The screens of the installation retransmit the bombed ruins, giving the impression that drones are at work. As in the American series «*Homeland*®», it is like being in the command post of a tactical operation in a war zone, but seen from a smartphone...

As an iconologist of polemology, Alain Josseau has not finished making images talk.

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Jean-Charles Vergne, 2016

Alain Josseau's works mainly concern the questions of time, representation and image in a permanent dialogue between drawing and cinema. Three films in particular have led him in recent years to produce large-scale drawings in a series entitled Time Surface: Rear Window (Alfred Hitchcock, 1954), Blow Up (Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966) and Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982). In these films, the same involvement of the spectator in the act of seeing as an act of voyeurism is at work. They engage in a reflection on optics and point of view and unfold a plot based on an investigation in which the photographic image, through its enlargements or the power of the telephoto lens, serves as a revelation and allows access to the smallest folds of the visible. Alain Josseau repeats the same investigation, the same dive into the image. But it is by using the drawing that he operates the remake, the passage from one screen to the other.

«In his drawings, all the scenes are remade, that is to say that what is made possible by time in the films (shots, camera movements, editing) is here compiled into a single image. Here, the surface is time and this is proportional to the duration of the sequence. In the sequence of the enlargement of Blow Up, the photographer makes a series of enlargements, a series of immersions in a single image, each enlargement starting from a zone of the previous enlargement that the photographer has circumscribed with a pencil. The image being enlarged, the number of elementary signs composing the image decreases proportionally to the rate of enlargement. The image is thus more and more altered and contains less and less signs, all the more so as he re-photographs the previous print each time. This immersion in the image has destroyed a part of the organized information, creating an image at the limit of the abstract, composed of grains. The space of Blow Up is a discontinuous space, a perforated space, constructed of successive planes with black in the middle. In this drawing, the whole sequence (and therefore the different enlargements) is flattened out, thereby mixing the levels of definition and allowing us to glimpse, in what are already only spots, a gun, a hand, a face.

Esper Sequence, acquired by the Centre national des arts plastiques in 2008, on long-term deposit at the FRAC Auvergne, is a series of fifteen drawings which, when brought together, form a monumental screen-image measuring three meters by five. This is a faithful reproduction - albeit fragmented like a split screen - of a famous scene from the 1982 film Blade Runner, directed by Ridley Scott, based on a short story by Philip K. Dick (under the original title Les androïdes rêvent-ils de moutons électriques?). The action takes place in Los Angeles in 2019. It tells the story of Deckard (Harrison Ford), a «blade runner» (a killer, literally «one who runs on the razor's edge») in charge of killing replicants, exact replicas of humans, that have gotten out of control. At a crucial stage of his investigation, Deckard discovers a photograph in a drawer that shows the interior of an apartment. At the back of the room, he sees a mirror in which a human form seems to be reflected. In order to isolate this form, which is essential to his investigation, he slips the photograph into a powerful computer called Esper, which equips the police and gives the images a three-dimensional resolution, allowing investigators to search a place without being physically present. With Esper, Deckard can literally enter the image, analyze it, and enlarge the smallest details with unparalleled precision. Alain Josseau reproduces the original image that Deckard must analyze with, in the background, the mirror in whose reflection Harrison Ford will eventually find an essential element to find and exterminate the fugitive replicants.

This photograph contains one of the essential themes of Ridley Scott's film, that of a world totally saturated with images. What characterizes the Los Angeles of 2019 is a permanent retinal aggression. The image is everywhere, on the skyscrapers, in the air, behind the windows flooded by the rain ... The replicants are themselves images of their creators, the humans, but so threatening that they must be «removed». The memory of the replicants is fake, based on old photographs that are false memories, intended to invent and maintain a past that never happened.

Jean-Charles Vergne, Director of FRAC Auvergne

1- Danielle Delouche, Alain Josseau, à la vitesse des images, Galerie Claire Gastaud / Le Bar, 2012, pp.18-19.

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Clement Thibault, 2018

If Alain Josseau's work testifies to an interest in the future of images rather than the history of forms, and to questions about society rather than art, it is by no means devoid of plastic qualities. But we will come back to that later. This work is built on a network of meanings, it is populated with arcs of images, and these plastic choices, too, are most often conditioned by the purpose of his works. These arcs of images evolve between different poles: the image (re)created ex nihilo / treated in mash up, fiction / reality. To do this, Alain Josseau researches, analyzes, and sometimes reconstructs events which, by their particular nature, have modified our relationship to media coverage. It could be the battle of Bull Run (1861) during the Civil War, where onlookers broke the scab in front of those who broke their pipes. A moment when the war was made a spectacle. It is also the assassination of JFK, for its particular symbolism. The day after the shooting, the whole world saw the same pictures of the 35th president of the United States slumped in his limousine and the film of Abraham Zapruder, mediatized a few months later, became a myth. It can also be the Kurdish offensive against Mosul, in 2016, shown on the Kurdish channel Rudaw but especially via facebook live. More than a show, the war can now be commented on and «liked» on social networks - 4 hours of broadcasting and 8,000 likes for the Mosul offensive, which, in the end, represented little more than a bulldozer ballet. In short, war is omnipresent in Alain Josseau's work. Not that he likes it, of course, or that it interests him particularly. Even if he knows tactical literature, Sun Tzu in particular, for which he has created a series of sculptures in homage to the six fields of the art of war [Les 6 terrains de l'art de la guerre, 2011], what interests him is the image industry. War constantly produces archetypes: flight simulators in the 1980s and drone views today, infrared images broadcast during the Gulf War or those of thermal cameras - archetypes that then infiltrate pop culture. And above all, it feeds them. Or, as Alain Josseau says, war creates and manufactures images. In the twentieth century, with their proliferation, we became aware of the power of images on society. We will not recall the links between Kodak and the Nazi regime, between Hollywood and American imperialism, the various propaganda, whether of totalitarian regimes or of organizations with more honourable facades, even advertising. Recently, it was the macabre photo of Aylan, lying on a beach in Bodrum, Turkey, his face half-buried in the sand, that moved Europe - and contributed, in its own way, to the writing of history. A few decades ago, it was that of a little girl burned with napalm.

But these images, Alain Josseau did not use them. Since 2000, his organic work has crystallized around three distinct practices. (1) With the Geographer series, he reproduces in watercolor press images in which military men and politicians appear around maps - sometimes suggested or off-screen. Power knows very well how to stage itself, how to construct the fiction of its legitimacy, and these delicate watercolors (if only in the irony of their title) capture this well. In recent times, the map has been able to give way to the screen; times are changing. (2) Alain Josseau is also interested in the geometrization of time, with the Time Surface series. In these complex and imposing watercolors (often divided into several panels), where different snippets of images are mixed, he freezes time and transforms it into space. It is often cinema that is involved, the grammar of time (shot, movement, montage) lending itself particularly to the exercise. For example, Alain Josseau has condensed Hitchcock's film Rear Window (1954) into a single image using several dozen photographs of the film taken at different times [Time Surface n°2 : Rear Window, 2009]. Assembled, they give a single «image-surface», where even day and night have ended up merging. Other works in the series depict images of war, views from drones and helicopters. In the eleventh, he is inspired by the «Collateral

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Murder» video published in 2010 on Wikileaks showing the massacre of civilians perpetrated from an American Apache in the Al-Amin neighborhood of Baghdad [Time Surface #11: Collateral murder 2, 2016]. These images, both Geographers and Time Surface, Alain Josseau makes them with watercolor, a «technique of the granny» as he likes to call it, but which he also quickly recalls was used by soldiers in the nineteenth century to illustrate the war, immediacy obliges. And then, watercolor has this liquidity that expresses the pixels well, and this slight blur created by the screen, the zoom ... (3) Finally, Alain Josseau plays with the indistinction between reality and fiction by constructing dioramas of scenes taken from fiction (Ridley Scott's *The Fall of the Black Hawk* (2001)) as well as from real neighborhoods, such as Al-Amin in Baghdad, which have been the scene of conflict. Theater is the right word, since in these dioramas, he makes videos, like (fake) documentaries or (fake) military images. Are these images false or true?

Playing with this indeterminacy, Alain Josseau is obviously not the only one. In the early 1990s, Thomas Ruff took a series of night shots of Dusseldorf (buildings, landscapes, cars...) with a night vision device, at a time when he was inundated with images from the Gulf War. In 1997, Maurice Benayoun unveiled during Ars Electronica a VR installation, *World Skin*, inviting its users to a «photo safari in the land of war». It was in the middle of the Balkan war. But what is, above all, a false or true image? An image that loses the substantial link it should have with its referent? An image that fools? Or are we the ones who are fooled by the image? All the actions of Alain Josseau, at first sight disparate, concern the same idea, that of mediatization, that is to say of the mediation that the image operates, whether it is fixed or moving. The image is not so much an object as a translation. A degenerative translation, since it implies a loss of information. The image has this paradox, to hide as much as it reveals. And the one who looks at it reconstructs, unconsciously or not, poetically or not, ideologically, the loss of information which took place in the translation. By dissecting the images and restoring them in other forms, Alain Josseau provokes a reflection on their modes of production and distribution, their status, their power, on the mediated perception that we have of reality and the media power in its manipulation. And with the war, we are served.

At the Claire Gastaud gallery stand (*Drawing Now*, 2018), Alain Josseau unveils his recent works. With *I for Icarus* (2018), the last of *Time Surface*, he assembled the four home videos Volney uses in the eponymous film investigating the JFK assassination. *Mosul vs. Bull Run* (2017) blends footage from the Battle of Mosul and Bull Run, creating an arc between two conflicts symbolic of an imagery of war. With the last watercolors of the *Geographers* series, we find again JFK, this time proud, talking in front of a map of Vietnam. A stand like a real «Jossaldian» condensed where the war is given in spectacle and to the appreciation of the curious, where the representations that the power gives of itself mixes with that which the cinema gives of the power, etc.

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