

LES DESSOUS DU CIEL OU L'ATTRAPE-NUAGES

Jean-Paul Philippe



Why a ladder in the Euroairport Basel-Mulhouse-Freiburg ? For a long time this familiar object had been appearing in my work, under my hand, on paper. It would appear in numerous drawings, in various situations, on the floor or upright... Then one day, as if self-evident, it became a sculpture.

In 2008, invited by the town of Siena to mount an exhibition in the Museum Complex of Santa Maria della Scala, I had the idea to install a ladder above a well and a mirror in one of the courtyards of this sublime medieval edifice. Each bar of this ladder would capture the rays of sun through the use of gold leaf.

Shortly afterward, the Fernet-Branca Foundation invited me to mount an exhibition in St. Louis. I found it interesting to enlarge upon the exhibition *Archéologies intérieures*, and to perfect that which I had begun in Italy. The courtyard of the Foundation lent itself to the project. Vaster than the Italian patio, it allowed me to make the mirror larger, to elevate the ladder higher, and so to refine the concept.

While installing the work under a beautiful June sky, as I was busy setting up the mirror, I saw, in the blue of the sky reflected in it, two or three clouds pushed by the wind... then very high in the sky, silently, an airplane appeared. A fine stream of white in its wake traced a perfect diagonal in the mirror... That

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very day, surely, the airport itself was giving me a sign. And, quite obviously, we are standing today at the bottom of this ladder.

The vertiginous inverted image that the mirror offers seems to be digging into the earth and reaching the sky, plunging into the infinite... In this well of light and glass, I could not resist tracing some words, so that, from time to time and according to the wind, they would float on the clouds.

“Well! What do you love, extraordinary stranger?’ / ‘I love the clouds,... the clouds passing up there... up there... the marvelous clouds!’»¹

As I was contemplating their course the end of that prose poem by Baudelaire kept on coming back to my mind.

Engraved upside-down on the glass wall that protects the ladder, the words of the poem are read and revealed in the mirror. They mix with the clouds or, according to the weather, they evaporate into the blue of the sky.

« Les dessous du ciel ou l’attrape-nuages »

When the time came to find a title, this came to me quite naturally.

It is now the name of that enigmatic object at the entrance of the airport that welcomes and greets the travellers and passers-by, coming from all the corners of this mirror and even further.... It waves at them and wishes them a bon voyage.

Jean-Paul Philippe

¹ « Eh qu’aimes-tu donc extraordinaire étranger ? j’aime les nuages... les nuages qui passent ... là-bas... là-bas... les merveilleux nuages ! »