Painting from the Source: Architecture, Nature and the Place of the Spectator in the Works of Sylvie Bouchard

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Architecture, nature, the human figure: these have been recurring elements in the works of Sylvie Bouchard for more than twenty years. Architecture figured prominently in her installations from 1983 to 1985; later, nature became a principal element in her landscapes on panels beginning in 1986; later still, the human figure appeared, alone or in a dialectical relationship with built or natural elements. Her use of these three "motifs" is not without import: just as they served as the original narrative tools within the image, they are *also* the main paradigms through which painting has constructed its mimetic relationship with reality since the fourteenth century. Bouchard's activation of these historically and symbolically charged elements is not intended to question painting as a socio-historical institution, nor does it claim to constitute a critical review of the pictorial genres generated by these topics (architectural "view," landscape, portrait). Rather, since the "architecture" and "nature" motifs are also two ways of presenting and defining painting, two modes of existence for painting as a medium, and the human figure is the semantic node that permits the embodiment of the relationship between humankind and nature, between a subject and the world within the painting, and hence a definition of the place of the spectator, their reactivation is part and parcel of a fundamental question: *What is painting?* This question regarding the essence of painting, the essence of art, was, as we know, the driving force behind twentieth-century modernism, while postmodernism considered it a formative illusion to be driven out through various "strategies." Contemporary times (since the 1990s) have *finally* allowed us, dare I say, to ask this same question, though only from the perspective of a philosophy of aesthetics. Looking back, we thus observe that from her earliest works (produced at the height of postmodernism) to the present day, Bouchard's investigations have always seemed eminently *contemporary*. In other words, her work, in its own specific way, has nonetheless consistently remained historically, conceptually and aesthetically relevant, and has done so with a continuity of form and content on which she has impressed, time after time, subtle but fundamental shifts in "point of view." Her work conveys a knowledge, as intuitive as it is reflexive, of the changing conceptual environments that

continually flood the art world—environments that she has helped to shape and crystallize as much as to establish them as representative, in hindsight, of important formal and conceptual "moments" in Montréal art over the last twenty years.

What Is Implied by the "Architecture" and "Nature" Motifs

Bouchard's work is marked, as I said, by a re-appropriation of three principal topics in painting: architecture, landscape and the human figure. The impetus for her first works came from the context of the 1980s, years that were characterized by, among other things, a return to painting, and notably by that powerful force known as "the return to the figurative"—in other words by a kind of *permission to resume painting*, and, what is more, figurative painting. Painting was thus deemed to be just as relevant as installation and photography. Nevertheless, Bouchard's decision to paint architecture, landscape and the human figure is far from being a mere product of this pro-painting, pro-figurative environment. It is important to note that her deliberate choice of these motifs, or more precisely, her choice of these work paradigms is far from insignificant: indeed, in the pictorial tradition, these two motifs—architecture and nature—are distinctive for having been essential means of transcribing reality and symbolically interpreting humankind's relationship with the world. Each was assigned a specific pictorial role in covering the essential aspects of this relationship with the world, with the result that architecture and nature have been defined in the pictorial tradition as absolutely distinct entities; each has become the vehicle of a specific mode of investigation and of rendering reality. Ultimately, they have been established as visual and semantic opposites. Actually, this antinomy simply adopts as its own a general concept familiar to the Greeks—the opposition between Man and Nature—which was taken up and continued by the Judeo-Christian concept of a harsh external world that has been hostile to humankind ever since the Fall. In painting, this is established as the opposition between the domestic world and untamed nature; the place built by human hand and "natural" nature; between a humanized environment (architecturally structured space, city and country) and the great Outside, total otherness, that which lies beyond—the outermost bounds, the source of all danger and all loss, the space of absolute solitude where raw matter (represented by the mountain in the Judaic and Latin Christian traditions, and by the ancient forest, dark and

deep, in the Celtic and Germanic traditions)[1] reigns. Characteristics firmly rooted in the tradition of representation thus allow us to define, formally and conceptually, as well as clearly differentiate, the architectural "view" and the natural "view."

By expressly mobilizing these characteristics in her work—and systematically deconstructing them—Bouchard would reach the core of what "creates an image" in painting: in works that make use of the architecture motif and in others that summon up the nature motif, certainly. More than that, however—for much of the interest in her work lies in the fact that it goes beyond the mechanical, repetitive application of the deconstruction process—these two supposedly contradictory worlds would speak to each other, from one work to the next, as her production progressed. She explicitly raises the notion that they are intrinsically interconnected and that, even in isolation, neither can fail to evoke the other, which is present as if in the background.[2] When she positions the human figure in relationship to these two worlds—notably in her most recent works (2001-2005) where this figure, with its powerful symbolic weight, is placed in an architectural setting or in nature—she takes care to continually short-circuit the conventional rhetoric associated with the presentation of this figure, or to suspend the *effects of meaning* that we immediately expect, in particular those psycho-optical effects that engage the spectator in an identification process.

Deconstructing

At the beginning of Bouchard's career, between 1983 and 1991, the exploratory, innovative quality of her work was sustained, in part, by a specifically Québec interpretation of postmodernism. That is, her work developed with a "material" sensibility coupled with a marked interest in a systematic, extensive deconstruction of the "mechanics" of illusionism in painting and the mythological substratum of the image. This took concrete shape, in her work as in the work of other artists, through a re-examination of the "codes of construction" (of constructing a "view"; of illusionistic perspective; of developing a mythology of nature), as well as through a return to the *material* of the works (with an innovative appropriation of the self-referential modernist

dictate) and a constant preoccupation with the place of the spectator (taking into account the various constraints imposed on it by the illusionistic system and by tradition).

In her early installations, Bouchard "deconstructed" some of the principal parameters of the illusionistic vocation of pictorial representation. She applied, quite literally, the fact that the illusion of the open window, which had founded and presided over painting since the Renaissance, is not only *constructed* but *built*. Indeed, the architecture motif formed the basis of her first deconstruction of the syntactical rules that govern the illusion of three-dimensional space and give it a psycho-optic coherence and effectiveness. She adopted the architecturally structured "view" in order to explore this favourite "place" in the illusionistic *system*—which has made this view an object that serves its own purpose, both a tool that demonstrates the all-powerfulness of geometric perspective, and a metaphor for the powers of human creation. Her work then would involve re-examining the mechanisms that make up this system, thereby revealing it as a *construction*. It would entail deconstructing the built environment, as represented in painting, in order to deconstruct the illusionistic process and its underlying metaphysics. In her first installation at the Powerhouse Gallery (*Installation*, 1983, p. 12-13), then in the group exhibition *Drawing – Installation – Dessin* (p. 14-15) at the Saidye Bronfman Centre (*Untitled*, 1984) and in *L'Observatoire des mille lieux* at the Galerie Appart', art actuel in 1985 (p. 24-25), Bouchard took up a whole *vocabulary* of building—window, door, stairway, ladder, aedicule, grid-patterned floor, chair, vault, dome, arcade—that, since the first tentative steps of Greek painting, has punctuated and sustained the mastering of perspective. She drew them in a graphic, linear manner on glass panels (1983), which a light then transferred to the gallery wall, reproducing both the principle and process of *projection* that form the basis of perspective. She painted them as well in powerful colours on large panels (1984, 1985), maintaining a constant ambivalence between the flat tints and the rendering of volume, between the contracted scale of depicted depth and the real depth of the objects in space, between empirical perspective and geometric perspective. Reaching to the ceiling, the panels are at once wall and painting, taking the spectator *into* the painting: in this way, Bouchard makes concrete—even kinesthetic—a three-dimensionality that had previously been *merely optical*, obtained through the

synthesis of perspective. Rather than appealing only to the eye, she restores to the whole body its motivity, its power to apprehend the real. At the same time, however, the strong pictorial quality of the works (their colours, their large size) preserves an ambiguity in the phenomenological experience they offer, the spectator having a sense of being both *in* the painting and nevertheless *outside* it, kept *in front* of it.[3]

Through the architecture motif and the building motif, as we have just seen, Bouchard re-establishes the *constructed* quality of re-presentation in painting: she shows us that beneath the illusion, a "machine" is at work. The interest of her art lies precisely in how she makes cause and effect—the operative "mechanics" (perspective) and the resulting illusion (a three-dimensional space in two dimensions)—work together on the same plane. She fully exploits the building motif as a highly effective *mise en abyme* for an examination of the principles and processes of *construction*—those creating the illusion of depth, in this case—as well as for the mechanisms involved in the perception and reception of *depth* and all the complexities this entails for the spectator. This is as true of her installations of the 1980s as of her most recent works—in particular, *Intérieur* (p.29), *Interstice* (p.58) and *Horizons* (p.71)—which develop a complex perceptual play between the supporting and contradicting roles of a solidly established scenographic cube and an empirically unstable perspective based on subtle gradations of colour. These shadings generate sufficient recession and depth in the space, yet paradoxically also indicate, through the opacity of the pigment and its application in thin, smooth layers, the flatness of the support.

Primitive Nature

The works produced by Sylvie Bouchard since 1986 significantly extend this examination of the paradigms of painting and of representation in painting, even while they introduce drastic changes. The format is considerably altered, from installation to painting, as is the representational content, which moves beyond the architecture motif to that of nature. Here, it seems important to me to see a shift in the artist's line of questioning more than a change in her general thoughts on the foundations of painting.

Since 1986, Bouchard has "simply" adopted as her own the *other* tradition of representing reality in painting, exploring all its ins and outs. In this way, she continued to take into account a certain absolute established by tradition, following it into terrain she had long worked with, and showing that, just as illusionistic construction came into being and *achieved its end* in architecture, the pigment itself—that fundamental constituent element of painting, with its ability to quote and mimic natural materials to varying degrees—fulfilled its own purpose in the representation of nature, likewise making use of a *mise en abyme*. It is as though, while pursuing ever further her consideration of painting, Bouchard had not been able to prevent the *Other* of the pictorial system from imposing itself almost of its own accord—in other words, the other half of the binary logic of the representation of reality in painting: landscape, the representation of the Outside (the Beyond). Through the nature motif, she carried on the deliberation she had begun with architecture, on the assumption that this first layer of deliberation "inevitably" calls forth the second, its paradoxical double—the "deadly ironic negation"[4] of the architectural order, namely nature. In this way she consolidates one of the basic founding intuitions of her work: that painting "architecture" or "nature" means mobilizing a clearly defined illusionistic practice and introducing specific visual issues.[5]

With *Paysage itinerant nᵒ 1* (p. 34), *De la nature à l'émergence d'un paysage* (p. 35), *Paysage avec figure* (p. 33), *Point fond* (p. 37), *Chemins* (p. 38) and *Paysage inversé, l'enracinement du ciel* (p. 39) landscapes begin to monopolize the space. In taking up the *other* face of the world (the world Outside, nature, instead of the domestic world Inside, architecture) Bouchard also takes up *another* way of representing reality: here, natural elements are traditionally understood as *material* rather than as surfaces. These elements call for an immediate designation rather than a mental reconstruction, with an "economy" of vocabulary and syntax instead of an organization of complex relationships. This is evident in the series of landscape paintings from 1986 to 1990: they are constructed from jointed planks of recovered wood that, although planed and polished, still impart to the surface the essence of their rough, rugged, even primitive, character, which the many coats of watercolour and wax or oil that become one with this surface do not seek to hide.

In *Les Bras de Daphnée* (1991), the surface of the plain waxed wood even constitutes the central focus of the work, its grain and the lines of its veins offered as a motif. Through these "landscape" paintings, Bouchard develops a specific treatment of pigment that has lasted until her most recent works. Her pieces, it should be noted, are always "highly worked," whatever their motif; they proceed from a remarkable personal technique, a long and meticulous application of pigments. Through this process, Bouchard takes on the *other* constituent element of painting which is, in addition to creating an image and an illusion, to be pigment itself, flat colour and opacity, as much as it is lines, drawing and transparency. She sees to it that this material dimension, so often introduced stealthily in the figurative tradition, right up to the moderns, is out in the open, side by side with the intellectual dimension of methodically, rigorously elaborating the image.

While the representation of natural and landscape motifs has the power to elicit thought on the status of the material in painting, it also automatically summons up a metaphysics of nature. And, just as this motif had allowed Bouchard to address the material foundations of painting, it would also lead her to present and deconstruct the original basis of the inherent relationship of humankind to nature. The natural motifs she chooses (trees for the most part) and, above all, her treatment and placement of them in the image are charged from the outset with a strong symbolic connotation reminiscent of the painting of the German romanticists, their deliberate, explicit treatment of the Sacred that is hidden in nature and their frequent evocation of the *Urwald*, the great primeval forest, albeit as something irreparably lost. Bouchard's trees are long, puny trunks capped with thin bouquets of short branches; they could not be called a forest. They are both a motif and an emblem, and the place they create is just as ambivalent. The trees (and sometimes an aedicule) are clearly set out as pictorial "motifs," and the "place" described is presented as a pictorial continuum. At the same time, however, these trees and their connection with the empty space convey a powerful symbolism, though truncated in its effects of meaning by its self-referential statement of the elements in play. Bouchard sets us before an "image" that possesses a certain symbolic allusion to a mummified or frozen Original nature, or to a post-Edenic nature, one of loss and abandonment. In this space that seems to have been deserted by meaning, she nevertheless opens up pathways.

Through their composition and treatment, these works seem to plunge into the depths that govern our primitive connection and atavistic relationship with the world. The artist encourages us to follow mazes and oblique modes of thought, like those forged by poetry, in order to understand them, while some works gesture to a dreamlike connection to reality (*Paysage inversé, l'enracinement du ciel*). In this way, Bouchard brings us back to an inevitable mythology of landscape, but only in order to deconstruct, and thus reveal, the archaic and dreamlike substratum hidden beneath the realism.

This deconstruction is taken further in a series of five oil paintings on wood panels titled *Le Bandeau d'Arlequin* (p. 40-41). Here, Bouchard quotes, in a way, from earlier landscape works, following a particular strategy: inserting the same motif of trees inside a clearly defined form that stands out against a red ground (*Sur le rocher, des racines qui poussent au loin*) or foliage (*Quodlibet, double nature*), or else by emphasizing them in their linear outline (*Arbres sur fond bleu, le don*), she reasserts the boundaries of the landscape motif and eliminates its symbolic content in favour of its pure "motif" quality. In *Le Chœur laissé aux autres*, she begins this process of affirming the pictorial by placing side by side, without any semantic link, the nature motif (a tree) and the architecture motif (space in perspective). She would, in later works, make even more definite use of this quotation technique, which brings an inward-looking dimension to the work and establishes it as a constructed image: in *Paysage intérieur* (p. 55), she clearly quotes as a "painting" the landscape section of *Paysage avec figure* (p. 33); and in *Random* (p. 61), the "background" of the depicted interior scene is shown as a large mural, truncated in height, on which trees are painted. This self-referential inwardness, which is first expressed in the landscape motif, is introduced by Bouchard through a systematic distancing from the nature connotation, the same one that characterized her first series of landscapes. She would subsequently apply a similar, inward-looking, device to the architecture motif, but integrating it with another central question in her work on the foundations of representational painting: *How should the human figure be placed in the work?*

The Place of the Spectator

One of the distinctive characteristics of Sylvie Bouchard's works is their continual consideration of the *place of the spectator*,[6] which she has sought to present through an exploration centred mainly on the *place of the human figure in the work*. This she has done essentially by reflexively integrating the human figure, in concrete form or allusively. Her earliest installations gave her the opportunity to experiment with a means of actively involving the spectator in the work, who she made the linchpin of the *situated-situating* device, a device that is the basis of installation works. She continued this investigation in her paintings with the concrete insertion of the human figure, gradually— and in a very contemporary approach—shifting her questioning from one of a phenomenological order to that of the aesthetics of reception. In *Paysage avec figure* (p. 33), the human figure appears in the form of a small autonomous portrait, completely independent of the landscape beside it: this way of placing the human figure *next to* nature extends and conveys more explicitly the concept of a total otherness distinguishing humankind and nature, which has already been dealt with in symbolic terms in the accompanying landscape. A similar need to register the inherent complexity of integrating the human figure may be found in *De la nature à l'emergence d'un paysage* (p. 35), a very large painting on wood panel. Here, this figure is introduced through a pronounced "distancing," with profiles of Greco-Roman statues, treated like phantoms floating in the landscape "medium." In the tondo-study *Colin-Maillard* (1992), the human figure becomes the sole motif, forming the beginnings of an investigation that is more closely focused on the placement of the human figure in its environment—and more precisely in relation to a "setting," as Bouchard would gradually indicate, particularly in her latest works. The study *Colin-Maillard*, in its spareness and utter simplicity, presents a figure on a purely chromatic ground: this presentation, which rules out any relationship other than the one between form and ground, is like an initial minimalist response auguring a complexity yet to come. And, indeed, in the works that would follow, Bouchard would continue to pose this question from various angles, increasing the connections in play. Already, in the painting *Colin-Maillard* (p. 42-43) that followed the study, and in two other subsequent tondi (*Merry-go-round*, [p. 48] and *La Partie quarrée*, [p. 49]), a fragment of an interior (corner of a wall, table, window) and tree trunks are added; the human figure is immobile, posed (except in the painting *Colin-*

Maillard, the only exception in many years of work), contributing to a closer examination of the question: "How should the human figure be placed in the work?" and not "How should the human figure be moved in the pictorial space?"

In this way, Bouchard takes up anew a problem which has been present since the beginning of illusionistic painting, and which perspective supposedly solved by likening the human figure to a piece on the checkerboard of the ground, following the requirements of the *istoria*, and calculating the appropriate recession in scale that would set this figure in relation to the surrounding buildings. Because the perspective system explicitly posed this problem, and because it was the relationship between the human figure and the architecturally structured environment that was formally expressed in terms of position (in the manner of the *situated-situating* spectator in the installation), Bouchard tackled the problem of how to place the human figure principally through built environments. She chose architectural interiors that would establish a "scenographic cube," and thereby tackle the problem head-on: she would construct this cube using geometric planes that fit together in space (and on this point, *Colin-Maillard* seems even more to mark the beginning of this work since the picture shows a person groping his way along). She would sometimes play these planes against each other, generating spatial ambiguities between the two- and three-dimensionality (*Intérieur*, [p. 29]; *Interstice*, [p. 58]; *Horizons,* [p. 71]), and affirming the painting's surface from the illusionistic representation of depth. She would thus display various sites in which the human figure would be "situated," always immobilized, striking a pose, and where the appearance of pure scenographic cube given to these *scenes* recalls Bouchard's constant concern with revealing the *constructed* nature of the image and establishing an active contrast between surface flatness and depth (*Autoportrait*, [p. 47]; *Intérieurs*, [p. 29]; *Jeu de l'envers*, 1995; *Croisées*, [p. 50]; and the series *Les Chambres colorées*, [p. 50-51]).

One of the difficulties that Bouchard would successfully overcome in this deconstruction and re-examination of the representational tradition is the question of how to re-appropriate the human figure as a *figure*, and how to hold the symbolism of Man, and specifically, man in actuality, at a respectable distance. As in the landscape paintings,

where she "negotiated" the symbolism of the relationship between man and nature—a symbolism inherent in the representation of nature—by approaching it through its derivative forms (primitivism, onirism) and archetypes (ancient statuary), here Bouchard once again "negotiates" the symbolic charge associated with the motif of the human figure. Through the position she give these figures –in the centre, striking a "pose", generally in a full-face or three-quarter view—she modulates the heavy symbolism associated with this figure according to her needs. In this endeavour, she makes use of a device particular to the representation of the human figure, namely the initiating of an identification between the painted figure and the spectator by means of the *point of view*, that is, through a process of optical, mental, psychological and moral association between the figure and the spectator.[7] She once again adopts as her own a topic of the pictorial tradition and "works" it, revealing its premises and conditions: the fixed nature of the point of view/vanishing point, in this case, underscored here by the fixed, static nature of the figures.

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In all her works, from her installations to the present day, Sylvie Bouchard has addressed the question *What is painting?* by striving to systematically deflect it onto the question of *praxis*, the question of the practice of "painting," onto the determinants and issues of pictorial practice. What she summons up through her renewed use of the fundamentals of the pictorial representation of reality is not so much the modernist question of the essence of painting as a highlighting of its *constructed* nature. While Bouchard's work from the first decade initially asked: *What does is it mean to paint*?—as did that of many artists in a time dominated by installation and a return to painting—we may observe that these works actually posed the considerably more precise question: *What does it means to paint After self-reflexive modernism?* The specific character of Sylvie Bouchard's work has been to respond to this by exploring the path of *What does it mean to paint the foundations of representation in painting in the 1980s and 1990s?* The answer to this question would be developed in terms of *What does it mean (to paint this)?* as well as *What does it produce?* in regards to deconstructive theory and the aesthetics of reception.

Elaborating her own investigation of the "practice of painting," Bouchard, rather than rejecting a self-reflexive pictorial modernism—which allows painting to define itself through the specificity of flatness and pigment—accepts this modernism, but in her own way. What she retains from this dictate of self-referentiality is the most open, changeable statement, to the effect that: painting talks about painting. In re-examining this self-definition of painting through the prism of its two modes of representation (architecture and nature) and its two modes of being (the construction of illusion and pigment), she surpasses the formalist impasse—surpasses in the philosophical sense of the term, that is, not by denying or dismissing it, but by creating a new form that incorporates it. In so doing, she enters, subtly and creatively, into the complex situation that now characterizes painting: a state of constant negotiation with its weighty heritage, its uncertain future, and other media deemed more contemporary.

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[1] The concept of the division between a humanized space, including city and country (for the Greeks, *polis, agros*; for the Romans and later in Latin Christianity, *urbs, rus*), and that which is beyond (*eschatiai* and *gaste,* respectively) may be seen in the depiction of a city, represented by its ramparts or its outer walls—which make of it a human space, an enclosed place, a refuge, as it is thematically presented in the *hortus conclusus* in the miniatures in early fifteenth-century manuscripts and books of hours. The depiction of the city would often be accompanied by that of its surrounding countryside; and, next to it, very distinctly separate from it, the great Outside would be signified by the mountain, forest and boulder motifs, for example.

[2] Mimetic painting integrated this into its very constitution, making nature the "Other" of the perspectivist system and its formative, regulatory principles, as Damisch showed in his analysis of Brunelleschi's *tavoletta* experiment: "Perspective only needs to 'know' things that it can reduce to its own order, things that occupy a place and the contour of which can be defined by lines…. Perspective [is revealed] as a structure of exclusion, the coherence of which is founded upon a series of rejections, and yet which has to make room for the very things that it excludes from its order, just as it does for the background upon which it is imprinted." Hubert Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud: Toward a History of Painting*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 124. This "background," which clearly must be provided for, would be the sky in the *tavoletta* experiment or, more generally, the "background" of nature inevitably summoned up by all depictions that lie outside the scenographic cube.

[3] As Martine Meilleur remarked in an in-depth analysis of this work, "a visitor wandering through Sylvie Bouchard's installations is never able to reconcile the contradictory impressions of being inside and outside a space built to be paced but where the meaningful reference points are essentially based on the pictorial system." Martine

Meilleur, "La reconnaissance et le dépaysement," *Parachute* 67 (July-August-September 1992), p. 6.

[4] Jean Louis Schefer, *Scénographie d'un tableau* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, coll. "Tel Quel," 1969), p. 78-79. As Damisch emphasizes, moreover, we owe to Vitruvius the conceptualization and formalization of an opposition between architecture and nature, through the opposition he established in the theatre between the tragic (or comic) scene which is defined "positively" by its presentation of an architectural built environment, and the satyric scene presented as its antithesis, its ironic negation: the "caves and mountains" seen here being opposed to the "structures built by the hand of man" present in the comic and tragic scenes, just as nature is opposed to culture. Hubert Damisch, *The Origin of Perspective*, trans. John Goodman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), p. 283.

[5] Note that the representational tradition of these two motifs has become less imperative and binding as it has offered all sorts of possibilities in regard to their associated pictorial mimetic devices: possibilities of contradiction, subversion, surpassing, as well as simple renewal. Thus, contrasted with the rigid, the polished, the smooth, with surfaces that reflect or deflect light—offered as characteristics of the raw material of the built environment—are the soft, the rippled, the rough, the mat, the opaqueness of natural elements; contrasted with the full mastery of space afforded by synthetic perspective (*perspectiva artificialis*) is the approximation of empirical perspective (*perspectiva naturalis)*; contrasted with the realm of the optical and the legible, with the travelling of the eye over the canvas, is the suggestion of a kinesthetic experience; and finally, contrasted with the "liberal arts" summoned up by the architecturally structured world are the "mechanical arts," called upon in the relationship between labour and nature.

[6] I am intentionally referring to the title of the French translation (*La place du spectateur*) of the book by Michael Fried devoted to Diderot's creation of an aesthetic of reception and invention of the spectator. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality. Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

[7] See, among others, Michael Fried (ibid.) on "absorption," a concept he develops in explanation of the aesthetic device that centres on the spectator's reception, as defined by Diderot in *La Promenade Vernet*, in the *Salon* of 1767.