

„The sign with the meaning non-sign“¹: Cloud Pictures of Dalila Dalléas²

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Already since the 17th century cloud representations in the Dutch landscape painting have „a special position in the history of art, because of her closeness to nature representation“, according to Ossing/Brauer.³ With cloud formations Dalila Dalléas opens a 300 year-old discourse in her work, which picks out as a central theme the picturesque and „space, light and colour“⁴. The artist has left blank the sceneries in contrast to the Dutch painters. The local relation of the picture series is created only by the title *Sky over Bordeaux*. It seems in such a way as if nothing should deflect the look, but to occur a contemplation. The German painter Caspar David Friedrich has expressed about his oil painting *Pulling Clouds* (1820) an essential principle of clouds: „they stand for a nomadic principle of the independence, for the timeless and limitless, negate every unequivocal delimitation of the frontier and thereby define a hardly determinable interstate. [...] Who deals with clouds, turns away the look of the things immediately surrounding him. It is, emphasised Bachelard, the gesture of the out-of-touch and the dreamer. However, it is also the gesture of the mystic and the poet.“⁵ Here elements of Dalila Dalléas tryptich-drawings can be found again: the fluent colours, which she uses in her triptych *Abd/Soumis*, point to the mystic and the

1 Title adapts from: Christine Weder (Universität Basel): „Fetisch als Zeichen mit der Bedeutung Nicht-Zeichen: seine paradoxe Signifikanz für die Literatur- und Kultursemiotik (Fetish as a sign with the meaning non-sign: his paradoxical significance for the literature semiotics and cultural semiotics.“ Lecture heard on the conference „Code der Leidenschaft (Code of Passion)“ in Hamburger Bahnhof Berlin, 10/9.-11.2008, translated from the original source German in English.

2 This text was written originally for a single exhibition (from the 27th of Nov., 2008 to the 17th of January, 2009) Dalila Dalléas in the Gallery Peter Herrmann. Revised in March 2011.

3 Franz Ossing/ Achim Brauer: „Erfundene Realität: Wetter und Geologie in Jacob van Ruisdaels Gemälde ‚Ansicht von Ootmarsum‘. (Fictitious reality: Weather and geology in Jacob van Ruisdaels painting, 'View of Ootmarsum')“ (Year unknown). Link (03/07/2011) <http://edoc.gfz-potsdam.de/gfz/get/9208/0/5d17c3fba4cc6bbcf1da37f6e6b1c928/ootmarsum.pdf>, translated from the original source German in English.

4 Wasserfallen, Franz (2008): „Louzla Darabi“ in: DU Kunstmagazin 2008, Zürich, p. 119. Translated from the original source German in English.

5 Guldin, Rainer (2006): „Die Sprache des Himmels. Eine Geschichte der Wolken. (The language of the sky. A history of the clouds.)“ Kulturverlag Kadmos, Berlin, Link (03/14/2011): <http://ssl.einsnull.com/paymate/dbfiles/pdf/resource/789.pdf>; p. 9ff. Translated from the original source German in English.

fluid. And the fluent colour points to a transitional stage between visible and invisible.⁶

Dalila Dalléas' work is connected with a political scandal in 2005, which was triggered by her picture *Scene D'Amour*. The picture shows a love act concentrated upon the female body. In the upper image border the first sura of the Koran is to be read: „*In the name of the merciful and graciously God*“. Islamic believers protested and the museum management in Gothenburg took down the picture. As a result an international debate aroused about "*the subjects eroticism, woman and Islam*"⁷. Henryk M. Broder and Nasrin Amirsedghi⁸, both journalists and many other feminists and human rights activists rebelled worldwide against the museum management. Ever since this picture and these events are connected to the work of Dalléas.

Also her white lacquered and 33 cm small combat-penguins provided by her in a spontaneous action in the London Tate Gallery were making noises. Without authorisation Dalléas placed them as „witnesses of the art events“ in museums and galleries. As a criticism concerning the commercialised art market, everybody could take the animals free of charge. At the same time they stand for a symbol of the silence of the people, who are the witnesses of the intensifying political situation in Europe in which censorship and autocensorship seems to spread on and on. The Tate Modern Gallery in London as the first action place stands exemplarily for this economic and political position. The Gallery exhibits merely established art and is supervised strictly.

Now with *Sky over Bourdeaux* Dalléas was risking to disappoint her politically ambitious audience and to turn now to an apparently "insignificant" art form. In an interview she said: „*Moreover, it has become clear to me particularly after the censorship in Gothenburg, that one expects a certain mode of expression from me as a woman of Algerian origin with Moslem background and French*

6 vgl. Wasserfallen, Franz (2008): „*Louzla Darabi*“ in: DU Kunstmagazin 2008, Zürich, p. 119. I translated it from the original source german in english.

7 Nasrin Amirsedghi on Broders Blog (14. März 2011): http://www.henryk-broder.de/fremde_federn/amirsedghi.html, Mainz, 04/14/2005. I translated it from the original source german in english.

8 See on Broders Blog Nasrin Amirsedghis comment (14. März 2011): http://www.henryk-broder.de/fremde_federn/amirsedghi.html, Mainz, 04/14/2005

residence, a certain demand they do to me. It concerns a form of the neocolonialism. One expects from you, from your art, a certain form which corresponds to your origin."⁹

What do the cloud representations in relation to her complete work mean: Is it a retreat or an allegorical reference? Is it a look inward or outward? Are her cloud pictures a "deception figure" and a simile-like reaction to the scandal in Gothenburg? Is art without reference possible?

The cloud studies look reserved in comparison to the events of Gothenburg and the penguin's action. They admit the possibility of several interpretations. The (ostensible) refusal of political contents in her cloud pictures is to be understood for me, nevertheless, not simply as an out-of-touch painting without reference or as an adaptation to the picture ban. I see the cloud series in a triple meaning to her creating: first withdraws Dalléas from the politically ambitious discourse and wants to pick out as a central theme her own picturesque expression. Rather spiritual aspects are in the foreground by the cloud pictures on the one hand and „*the picturesque expression in the form of space, light and colour*“.¹⁰ And secondly the cloud pictures provoke almost the reflection about the political picture by the absence of calligraphic, erotic and figurative elements. Cloud representations as a sign with the meaning non-sign: it is not the gesture of an out-of-touch and a break with the political picture, but the gesture of a poetic language and the break with the political picture as a taboo. Clouds stand as *pars pro toto*, as a part of a bigger and more complicated whole, which oscillates in a movement between the political and poetic. And thirdly one can read this also absolutely as an ironic reference to the expectations to Dalléas as a politically ambitious artist. If I look at the cloud pictures, I can simply indulge myself in it. At this moment the political makes no difference to me. But because I write about the relational in her work, I see them as *pars pro toto* in the next moment. The moment I enjoy the cloud-pictures, my mind and my emotions are switching between the poetic (freedom of clouds, untouchable, close to a different sphere) and the political (the events in Goetborg, the Koran, Women). The views I have

9 Wasserfallen, Franz (2008): „*Louzla Darabi*“ in: DU Kunstmagazin 2008, Zürich, p. 119. Translated from the original source German into English.

10 Wasserfallen, Franz (2008): „*Louzla Darabi*“ in: DU Kunstmagazin 2008, Zürich, p. 119. Translated from the original source German into English.

are switching on and off again. That's why I can't turn around of her complete work, it keeps me busy in asking questions, it relaxes me and it is inspiring me because of the non-sign as a sign.

A piece of art of an artist is like a sign in the work. It also points to the non-signs. And the piece of art sits down in relation with its past and future works. But, and this is the dynamism in the biography of an artist, the sign can grow pale or become stronger again, depending on how the discourse looks. *"I don't like so much the political aspect of my work. I want to show another part of my work more closer of me."*¹¹, she said during an interview. Dalila Dalléas withdraws from the politicised discourse around her art and puts her own discourse. The artist just follows not simply an „Order of the discourse“, while she bends to possible expectations and produces politically stirring up pictures and politically ambitious art: *„Now I do not care about contemporary fashion art“*.¹² The events around Gothenburg grow pale and another aspect, that of the picturesque, the independence, pushes before the politicised sign in her work. The German painter Caspar David Friedrich was against a meteorological definition of clouds, for him *„clouds were [...] a symbol of the freedom. They are high on top in the sky, nobody can touch them“*¹³.

11 Wasserfallen, Franz (2008): „Louzla Darabi“ in: DU Kunstmagazin 2008, Zürich, p. 119. Translated from the original source German into English.

12 Wasserfallen, Franz (2008): „Louzla Darabi“ in: DU Kunstmagazin 2008, Zürich, p. 119. Translated from the original source German into English.

13 Guldin, Rainer (2006): „Die Sprache des Himmels. Eine Geschichte der Wolken. (The language of the sky. A history of the clouds.)“ Kulturverlag Kadmos, Berlin, Link (03/14/2011): <http://ssl.einsnull.com/paymate/dbfiles/pdf/resource/789.pdf>; p. 9ff. Translated from the original source German in English.