

## Yvan Derwéduwé's pleasure principles

The phrases Yvan Derwéduwé applies on 'his' found paintings – 'PLEASE', 'THANK YOU PLEASE', 'PLEASE COME AGAIN' – are in such thin red paint that one can see the original works beneath. Derwéduwé's act is not one of defacing an original, but rather of questioning the adopted paintings as sources of pleasure. The pastoral landscapes, interiors, and maritime scenes he overpaints were at the time of their making just that, pleasurable fungible objects meant to furnish homes or offices with tokens of artistic creativity – but a kind of pleasure without displeasure: benign gratification of 'good' taste.

For his 'PLEASE' series, Derwéduwé uses clearly identifiable 'genre' paintings – interiors, still lifes, portraits, etc. Back when painting was the finest of the fine arts, genre provided painters with the acceptable limits within which to deploy their skill. With the historical avant-gardes of the late 19th century, genres ceased being effective means of classification, and painting could no longer be fully entrusted as vectors of comfortable pleasure. Édouard Manet, for example, was radical for merely suggesting that different genres could collide on one surface. Is his 1863 Olympia a nude, a portrait, or social critique? Her placid, inscrutable face looks at the viewer, leaving her or him guessing about what kind of pleasure might be at stake.

In 1895, Freud coined the 'pleasure principle' to describe the basic impulse driving human psychology, namely the gratification of desire. As the child develops, she/he learns to defer such gratification by negotiating with the pleasure principle's counter force, the 'reality principle'. In his writings from the period, Freud would sometimes substitute 'pleasure' with 'unpleasure', suggesting that the libidinal quest for pleasure may not always align with satisfaction, and that desire can pose a destructive risk to the psyche's economy. Explaining the subject's repetition of repressed memories is particularly difficult without the concept Freud later articulated as 'beyond the pleasure principle': a death drive more fundamental than eros, towards which all subjects are drawn, sooner or later.

---

Derwéduwé himself has compared his paintings to the 1992 sculpture Oh, Charley, Charley, Charley... by Charles Ray. The American artist depicts eight life-size clones of himself naked taking part in an orgy. In Ray's sculpture, the pleasure principle turns unmitigatedly to unpleasure as the erotic becomes obscene, even abject, through mechanical reproduction. In Derwéduwé's case, the act of topping the anonymous painters with erotic word play obeys a more fragile, hesitant kind of (un)pleasure principle. The semi-concealed genre paintings Derwéduwé repurposes by hand maintain a kind of quasi-identity. The orgy here is not of bodies but of affects and names vying for the viewer's attention.

Derwéduwé's 'PLEASE' paintings sit at the edge of pleasure and a darker side of eros. On their surface, the series reads like a corporate PowerPoint, a thread of AI-generated implorations from some virtual personal assistant. Indeed, their red borders – and the limited edition 'PLEASE PLEASE' badge produced for this exhibition – recall the ergonomic form of a tablet or phone. At the same time, the paintings' linguistic repetitions tap a deeper pool of emotions, harking back to artists who, in the 1960s and early 1970s – such as Marcel Broodthaers, Lee Lozano, and Bruce Nauman – used words to convey psychological and semantic tension.

Between generic slogans and unsettling repetition, each painting in Derwéduwé's series becomes oddly touching, like zombies straining to imitate human expression. The near anthropomorphic transformation is accentuated by Derwéduwé's turning each painting sideways. From 'landscape' format, they all become 'portraits', which, admittedly, reduces their instant recognisability as paintings, but at the same time gives them a human-like standing in the world. This human-like presence is detached from the historical reality of the painters whose work serves as Derwéduwé's understudies. All that remains of the original painters' identities is their signatures or initials, sometimes barely legible, like 'Herman', 'Bonirt', 'D. Mertens', 'Demoen', 'Siborgs M', etc.

Who is addressing who? Are the paintings speaking to the visitors? Derwéduwé to the anonymous painters? Painting in general as a 'for sale' sign in a gallery context? Or Derwéduwé to himself, an artist recognising himself anxiously in the forgotten painters of the past? The possible configurations of speaker and addressee are endless, a kind of subjective Rubik's cube where the more repetitious and melodramatic the invocation ('PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE'), the more disturbing the message. Not easy to spot the 'real' Derwéduwé amid these endless pleas. The best one can do is reciprocate the kindness by thanking the artist(s) and coming again.