

Claude Tétot

FRAGMENTS ON CLAUDE TÉTOT

Text by Éric Suchère

Text accompanies the exhibition Claude Tétot, presented at the Fournier Gallery, Paris, March 3 - April 2, 2011.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 63 x 78.7 in

1. Claude Tétot's artwork is efficient, which is to say that it comes across in a very direct manner, that it reads—at least initially—without ambiguity, that it establishes seemingly clear-cut relationships among its components, that it provokes a physical impact, this too very direct, mainly prompted by the color saturation, its quantity, the relationship between such quantity and the size of the painting, the limited number of shapes, the brutal contrasts between its elements... one could seek for prestigious antecedents to this efficient artwork among early 20th century French paintings as well as American paintings of the second half of the same century, but the question lies elsewhere for the question involves the obviousness that occurs from the onset and, in this obvious artwork that seems to convey everything at first glance, to see how it veers, proffers solutions that are not—once they are probed—quite so efficient, invents novel propositions in this field of efficient artwork and, as a result, is no longer so—for efficient artwork does not veer off—, but is a snare or its distortion, where the promised immediacy of the direct effect is incessantly affirmed and foiled, and is thereby artwork that counters our world of maximal effect.



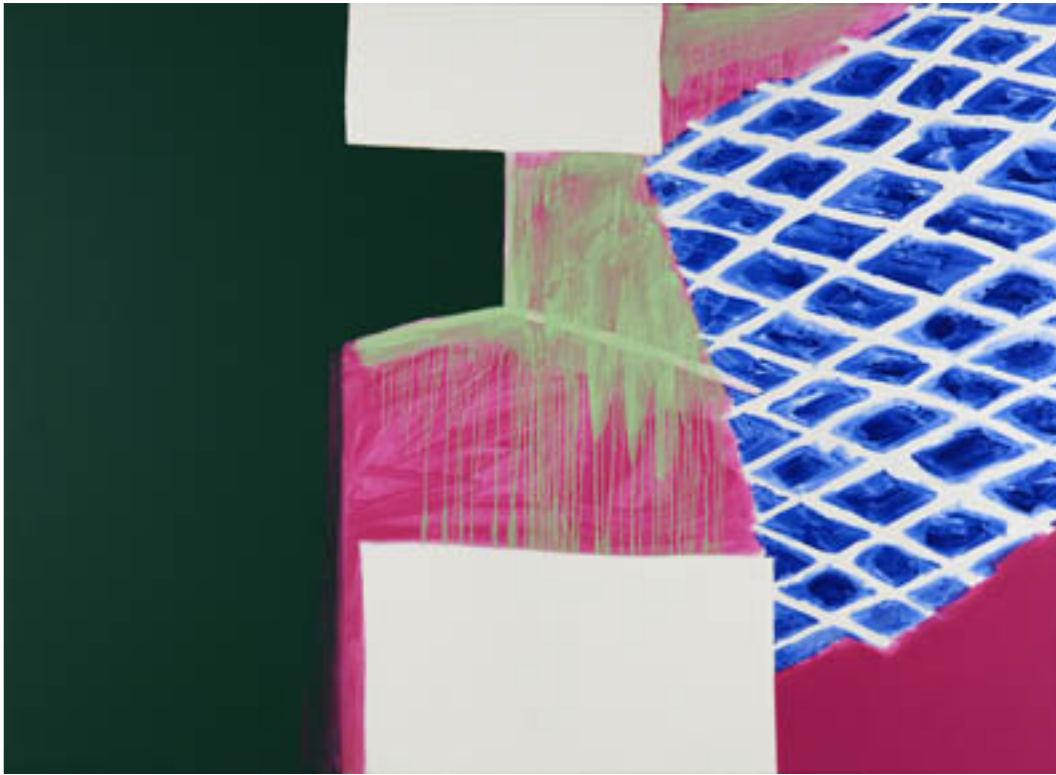
Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 70.9 x 76.8 in

2. In this painting as in so many others, space is fraught like a blue smear—which gives the sensation of being frontal—seems pierced by red shapes vigorously brushed and one cannot tell if the blue is foreground or background with regard to the red and, at the same time, a series of black lines slanting through the painting might simulate perspective and get disrupted by a black stroke that squashes the view while yielding, on the left, a space neither truly frontal nor quite illusionist and the ensemble of these contradictions between bidimensionality and tridimensionality, between what seems foreground or background—due either to the outline, or to the color or to how we focus on it—could lead one to think that this painting delights in spaces, that it simulates spaces, that it plays with our perceptive habits, that it is, in this interplay, the opposite of formalist painting, that it delimits, because it is precisely a painting, a space—spaces—, that cannot exist anywhere but in the painting, that it is the story of the rapport between the object's reality and its material and the virtuality of what it divulges and leads us to think that a painting can convey with so little that we live in a world of simulations.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 66.9 x 78.7 in

3. In this painting as in others, it is a question of surfaces, of surface typologies insofar as surfaces can be opaque, transparent, modulated, solid, runny, meticulous, slow smears, quick brushstrokes... and these typologies hark back to stylistic registers (expressionist, geometric, minimalist) or to sensorial registers (cold, hot, smooth, liquid) and, therefore, in a single painting, to the grammar of surfaces—the grammar of surfaces is, indeed, art history scaled down—to a grammatical compilation that raises the issue of the truth of the hand—which does not imply a unique method that belongs to one person alone since all methods are employed simultaneously—and to what these surfaces say—since surfaces are, for the most part, expressive or else evocative...—and where one can grasp that, for Claude Tétot, painting is not linked to a truth of being or to a will for expression but is merely rhetoric—i.e. a form of eloquence—and this rhetoric, which seems to have no other goal than itself, makes us wonder if painting has anything to say, can say anything or leads us to think that after all, the visible world is, it too, a non-signifying compilation and that our world, too, is eloquent but says nothing.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 63 x 86.6 in

4. In this painting as in others, it is a question of heterogeneity as the surfaces and shapes stem from different—and often rather distant—registers and, if this heterogeneity brings to mind a collage, the question is, then, about montage, about the passage between two shapes, about the jointure between these heterogeneous elements, a question essential to painting—how to pass from one shape to another, how to organize the rapport between two things, how to elicit the transition or else the shock, the continuity or else the discontinuity –, but this means assuming the objects are fragments—which is the essential question of montage—and, if one has assumed a bit too promptly that discontinuity harks back to a lost continuity, one might just as well imagine that this painting plays upon discontinuity as if it were a continuity—or the opposite—and the question, consequently, is not about cutouts and montage but about bifurcation and derivative, about disruption as our normal mode of thought, about interruption as our normal mode of elocution, about breakage as our mode of apprehending what surrounds us and, consequently, figures propped on the surface of a painting that seem a priori devoid of logical interconnections are the best means to convey our world which is one of flux.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 63 x 78.7 cm

5. In this painting, perhaps more than in others, the heterogeneity of forms and surfaces is affirmed in a sort of uncoiling where, in the lateral outgrowth, one can clearly detect not just the absence of style—unless the absence of style is a style unto itself—, but, equally, that this art proceeds through clips or winks or quotes or, more likely, through what is called, in music, samples and, in a sample, the sampled element takes on a new coloring due to its context—to the point where its origin becomes, sometimes, barely identifiable—, while coloring its new context with that of its origin and it is undoubtedly this notion of coloring or, more precisely, of coloring by connotation that matters as in how the signs, shapes, and even certain colors—even more so than sounds—are connoted and as the question is no longer the creation of new signs or new languages, but our ability to recycle what has been sign and language, to put them at a distance, or to put them back in circulation, to perturb a sign’s resonance with that of another, in other words to play with history and its memory and, perhaps, for a painting to tackle the memory of shapes but not merely since our world is that of an inflationary hyper-memory.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 70.9 x 86.6 in

6. A shape, color or gesture are always connoted but say nothing or say only themselves and their connotations and, for them to say something—even if this something be their own literalness—, they must be parsed among themselves just like units of a sentence and this parsing, while it postulates a liminal meaning, does not suffice since this meaning will always depend on two factors: context and intonation—whoever has misconstrued a letter knows the value of intonation and its ensuing shifts of meaning—and, just like a sentence, these units and their reciprocal parsings change meaning according to the context or, more precisely, set up a context by their parsings and by the sum of their parsings and, perhaps, that Claude Tétot does paintings that contextualize, decontextualize and recontextualize shapes, colors and gestures such as this painting in which a red arabesque + a faded blue background + an ochre expanse + multicolor circles + a green smudge... set up complex interrelations warping our possible readings of each of these units, requiring the viewer's involvement in setting up the overall intonation—lyrical and / or parodic, inexpressive and / or thrilling, restrained and / or exuberant, etc.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 65 x 78.7 in

7. This painting by Claude Tétot seems to play solely with spaces and surfaces, to posit solely a grammar of surfaces, seems to play solely with their heterogeneity, to proceed solely by clips or samples, seems to contextualize or decontextualize its components or seems unaffected—or unpsychologized—because it deploys superimpositions of expressive registers, thus of affects, without emphasizing any one of them, yet it is precisely because it superimposes them that it does not discard them and, divulging them by superimposing them, puts them at a distance, neutralizes them for a moment, enables us to consider them and, while considering them, to take, we too, distance from them, to relativize them, to glimpse in them, admittedly, the driving force of art—one does nothing without affects and one cannot live without them—, to view them as triggers that are healthy but often inappropriate for art and to grasp that they are not a finality, but like putty in our hands, in short, to “pacify” them rather than being overwhelmed by them and, thereby, this seeming coldness, this distance, is, more so than in an “expressive” painting, the best path to awareness, to becoming aware of them while sidestepping their traps since art is not —is rarely—a direct discourse.



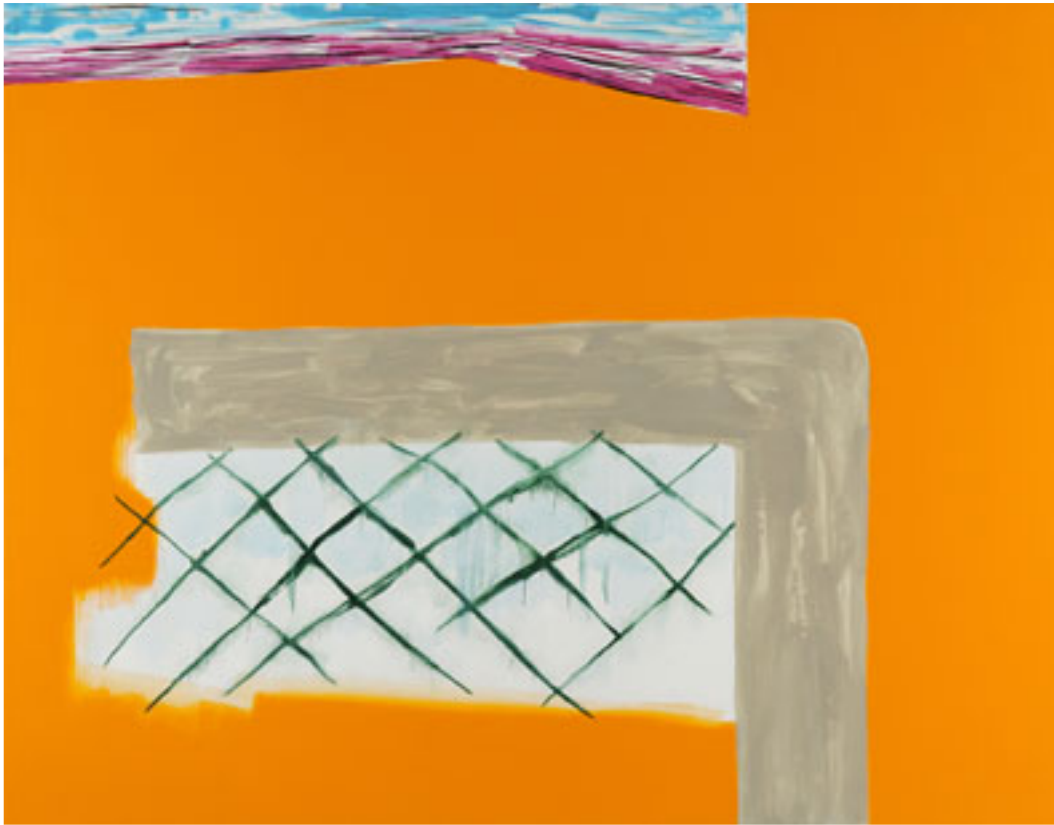
Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 66.9 x 78.7 in

8. In this painting by Claude Tétot, the grid could evoke a fence as the solid color could signify a wall and the ruffled surface could, in its dilution, recall soil and its bumpiness except Claude Tétot does not exploit landscape features to render them abstract, he is not seeking to render a stylization of the real world within the world of painting, nevertheless it is not so easy to unhook ourselves from reality and it is unthinkable to imagine that natural or fabricated shapes do not occur, cannot occur, by analogical detours, in these paintings that flaunt their artificiality and even if Claude Tétot denies it, the viewer, almost always, applies, at least initially, an analogical reading, reads the surfaces by analogy, applies analogies, transposes into the painting at hand one's entire previous experience of the world and establishes, in this way, similarities and dissimilarities, invents newfangled connections, detects faces even in the most diversified and seemingly anomalous phenomena and it is in thus establishing possible connections, in the potential wealth of connections, that the paintings, that this painting attains some of its value since our world is one of connections.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 70.9 x 76.8 in

9. This painting conveys, like many others, a penchant for disharmony, a penchant we've got used to after a century and a half or more of modernity although, in the long run, disharmony becomes harmony, a paradoxical harmony but nevertheless a harmony unless it be considered that this penchant for disharmony is not the replay of a mode specific to modernity and its shock aesthetics, of spasm and stridence, but rather involves going beyond harmony and disharmony, proposing an object that might be govern-ed by other rules, it involves, in fact, urging us to rethink the way in which we establish links between things, links between surfaces, colors, shapes or contours... hence this disharmony is not negativity—even intended positively—but a way of redefining relationships, a way of rethinking the hiatus, i.e. not strictly a gap, an interruption, a lacuna but a space between two things and if this implies a pictorial challenge—of showing the space between pictorial “objects”—, one could also think, beyond painting, about the other arts, about the space between two sounds or even two words... all being things that provide us with a different understanding, beyond our habitudes, of what arises before us.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 66.9 x 86.6 in

10. Claude Tétot's paintings are statements, which is to say that they are declarations in their own right, are autonomous, without any referent other than themselves, that say what they say or, to exit the realm of language, that they show what they show, which is very close to Frank Stella's famous quip, his "what you see is what you see" phrase that needs to be put in context since Stella is not saying that painting says nothing, transmits nothing or is a tautological practice upon which language has no grip but rather that one must get a visual sensation, that painting is purely visual and one could pursue this idea by saying that if painting is purely visual, it ultimately says nothing and, for that matter, why should a work of art say something, why wouldn't it accept to just be—Stella's claim for its "objectivity"—, which is what Claude Tétot's artwork does like an orange, a grid, a solid color... even if these might prompt analogies with the world outside of painting, even if they can be linked to stylistic and / or expressive registers, are merely an orange, a grid, a solid color... in no way metaphorical, allegorical or symbolic but solely surfaces on the surface, without any depth or transcendence.



Untitled, 2010, oil on canvas, 66.9 x 82.7 in

11. Claude Tétot does not exist—in this painting as in so many others—, in that he does not express himself here, expresses nothing as all he does is postulate an idea of art through his paintings or that his paintings are particular exemplifications of an idea of art or that each painting is a particular expression of an idea of art which is not defined prior to the painting and which the painting manifests, divulges, but which did not exist and enables Claude Tétot to see it, to become aware of it, to do the next one, to rely on the previous one in order to do the next one and, thereby, to postulate an idea of art that did not exist beforehand, etc. or, to employ an analogy, Claude Tétot’s artwork is the theater of an idea of art or the theater of the language he wishes were that of art and he is thereby external to the painting, external to what he paints, as he sees it unfold—just like a theater director sees his play take shape and gives directions contingent upon how the actors act and react—and hence the artist is exterior to what he paints since he has, most certainly, an intention, yet this intention manifests itself in an exterior medium—painting—and, to cite Emmanuel Hocquard, “whoever writes or paints remains off-screen”.