

*In order that there is a scene that you can see, I mean that I can have seen,  
the theatrical representation of something, let's say that I have photographed it as it is,  
there has to have been all around straight vertical lines.*

*Pascal Poyet*

At the beginning of cities and civilization nearly 10,000 years ago, roads had not yet been invented. The houses to stay upright leant against each other. Their brick walls didn't have edges with sharp enough angles to form regular vertical lines. To go from one house to another you went out onto the roof and you entered the house from the roof. The roofs were flat and the weather just about allowed for this. Of the city then you only had an image of an exterior horizontal span of flat roofs one after another. There were no windows, there was the sky. The visible space for movement in the city was divided. The exterior space that would be walked had a two dimensional perspective. This is what I think I believed I understood after reading Claude Thibery's book *"The Hollow City"*. I nevertheless knew from my childhood that the Mediterranean cities had flat roofs. This didn't prevent, when in 1994, in Malta, before I had read this book and I stood for the first time on a flat roof from which I could see different levels of terraces, the strong impression this left me with. The only way I could convey this view was by taking a photograph. The quaintness of the washing hanging on the roofs and the countless television aerials lessened the impact that this vision of centuries there in front had on me.

It was only after reading this book on the history of the city, and many years later, am I now able to talk about how this view captured my gaze. These rooftop terraces bring up the issue of what is underneath them, the primitive cave, the roots and tombs which the visible covers over in many ways. It is after careful thought about opacities, thickness and depth, that the continuity of a landscape between the dry land and the sea in continual movement takes hold, the open sea, the changing horizon line, on the surface of which neither the eye nor the foot can be supported or have a bearing. It is around this point that Alice Hamon develops her work, both in her drawings done on the spot, her photographs, through fragments brought back from trips and her job as a sailor. If the lines and shapes, more or less geometrical, painted on flat roofs make us think of the patterns on carpets scaled up to that of a landscape, the fact of drawing the lines on the ground and sometimes advancing the lines and projecting them on the vertical walls - is very like the projection of shadows and their variations according to the rhythm of the day. A statement then of paths, of directions, which defines positions in relation to the sun: at different hours, in different places. This is like a simple naval operation, where directions are indicated in a given place, and could refer to other places and to develop an aspect of her artistic work "in each port" so to say.

This work is made up into several groups, the three main ones are, firstly drawings done in a space (flat roofs), secondly photographs and finally glass framed graphic compositions combining pencil drawings, prints with colored work. These framed glass boxes group together fragments of images of journeys, pencil drawings, using the glass as well, a little like a boat in a bottle. The special nature of this work is that the glass is also used graphically. Simple flat shapes can appear when the glass is rubbed with sand paper, translucent but not transparent, where the shapes are made. This glass surface partially roughened doesn't allow you either to get close to the drawing or to see it completely without shifting your gaze. There is a time lapse between the hand and the eye. Instead of not being there, the glass has a place through this alteration in its transparency. The depth of these framed boxes, moreover, allows for a shadow of these shapes to be projected onto the drawings behind. The glass has a place in the composition similar to that of the surface of the water. When you look through the water to the bottom the vision is unstable. Wall, mountain, upright table, modern art never ceases to relate to the horizontal line in front of us. The depth is an obstacle, there is the image of the iceberg with the part above the water and there is the expression, just the tip of the iceberg. And works of art through their representation keep a part that is submerged of which we cannot simply give a name to.

Representation versus making-off: the photographs of icebergs by Alice Hamon play with the well known images of icebergs such as the verticality, the absence of any indication of scale and what is revealed seems an impossibility, gigantic when you relate it to a landscape you can walk on, no intermediary between the giant shark and the pilot fish, the only possibility is an error of compromise. Where the images placed on top of each other caused by the malfunctioning of the camera\* created an overlay effect which reenacted this error of

appreciation, the failing to perceive the landscape, of this landscape Like the frosted glass which interferes with the perception of a drawing which it covers - a reflection or is it nothing? An aerial view of Greenland in 1947 published by the International Cloud Atlas (World Meteorological Office 1975) reminds us, with the presence of a flotilla of kayaks, of the scale and the determining factor of a point of a view. From the water, the view of the coast line puts us face to face with the vertical line and that a boat is finally just a vertical line or a series of vertical lines on the vast horizontal space of the water. Moreover a vessel and the slopes of a roof turn out to be built by the same profession, carpenters - responding to the relentless movement of the water. In one case the flowing water preserves the building from ruin, in the other case preserving the vessel from sinking to the bottom. Between these two aspects, there is a mirror image of the shape and the same Latin root, there is this plan of which you can only see one side at a time: the surface of the water, the roof terrace, the glass where a part is frosted which limits our vision, the trace in the water of the boat, the invisible part from the bridge. We could call this a blind zone from which the lines are drawn and figures are placed, on this surface. Where finally the shadow appears, which proves that we are really here, at the place from this point of view which escapes otherwise our vision.

*\* I remember in January 2000 in Montreal going to the neighboring island in Saint Laurent, seeing a geodesic dome built by Buckminster Fuller. It was minus 25, there was 1 meter of snow and not a soul living there. The camera that I had brought with me just in a bag, was a Mamyia Press, quite big with lots of mechanisms. When I wanted to take the photograph of the dome, it appeared that the shutter mechanism was frozen. On my way back I thought of the dance scene with Buckminster Fuller as a jelly fish at Blackmountain college.*

*Trad. Charlotte Hartigan, 2023*

In the broad field of the representation, the work of Alice Hamon oscillates between the fiction and the reality to define a better position to mark with a cross on a world map.

Let us stop on this roof covered with chalk in the middle of a green landscape (Ici Ailleurs 2013), we see the artist's intervention in a remote zone and we understand quickly that walking is her first pleasure. Within this intervention two actions are at play: The drawing in the manner of a framework and an aerial photography which is almost floating.

The critical point of this work is determined by a question taking shape and emerging from the image, is it a drawing or a photography we want to represent?

All becomes undecisive but in the same time precisely layed out with the choice of frame and focal. In another photography (Bains des dames, 2007), we find an image of a drawing inscribed in a landscape, shown this time in a Mupi around which the space has been invested by children. We enter the urban environment where social relationships take shape, another track game settles down and troubles us about the order of priorities; a space creates a second one bordering with the surrealism of Magritte.

Alice Hamon's photos oscillate peculiarly between an image of reality and fine art photography, between the idea of walking dear to Cartier-Bresson and the idea of a relational esthetic from Nicolas Bourriaud. It is within an indecision, a refusal of choice or within the assertion of a double-choice that posture and point of view give full meaning; the work is indefinite or to determine.

By playing with mock documentary and choosing locations affected by troubled current history (Sour in Lebanon and Island Arwad in Syria, 2011) that fills the images with an emotionnal load, and by interweaving them with other places or cities (Lokken in Denmark, 2013) where peace and well being reside, the work shows how the world becomes a ground for a game of contradictions at the reach of a sole person.

Here we can see that photography has matter of politic which involve and responsabilize directly its author. Perhaps, with this case of the image within the image, there is a way out, a possible distanciation from a critical position in order to preserve the freedom to travel keeping at bay the pathos of actuality.

*Trad. Anthony Faroux*

Susan Sontag writes: "The painter constructs, the photographer discloses." And add later in her essay "On Photography": "By nature, a photo can never completely transcend its subject as a painting can." This is probably why a visual artist like Alice Hamon is at the crossroads of photography, painting and installation. Her works construct and disclose like this large photography on PVC canvas (5m x 7.5m) displayed in the center of the exhibition "The City in Art" at the Orangery of the Senate in Paris last June.

Apparent subject: Calade (it's the title). A fragment of the port seen from the terrace of a social housing block. But this terrace photographed overhanging, fills half the surface of the work and was invested by geometric traces drawn with chalk. In such a way that here is the apparent subject transcended. It looks like Alice Hamon thought about lessons from Edward Weston, one of the pioneers of photography who prophesied the advent of a subversive photography as a unveiling venture.

It is true that the popular neighborhood of Marseille chosen by Alice Hamon has nothing remarkable. But she intervened in the heart of the landscape - at least in the heart of the image that she draws - to which she offer a contrast, an emotional charge that changes everything. For photographers, there is no aesthetical superiority between the effort to beautify the world and the opposite effort to tear off its mask. It is to this double task that Alice Hamon devotes herself with virtuosity as evidenced by the spectacular piece sent to the Orangery of the Senate.

Walter Benjamin taught that a common criterion of excellence between painting and photography could be the presence. The presence was a characteristic feature of the work of art but he doubted that a photograph, to the extent that it was a mechanically reproduced object, could have a real presence. Unless the photography was only one of the components of a complex device where the artist intervened according to a carefully considered project. This is obviously the case of Alice Hamon's work which stands out for its exceptional quality of presence.

Susan Sontag is right when she underlies that photography, while not an art form of its own, has this special power of transforming everything it takes into an artwork. One could even say with her that today "all art aspires to the condition of photography". This is What Alice Hamon demonstrates with an exemplary efficiency.

**Jean-Luc Chalumeau**

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*Trad. Anthony Faroux*