

Marc Bauer

CENTRE CULTUREL SUISSE

I don't know to what degree Marc Bauer, a Swiss artist who lives in Berlin, was aware of the powder keg on which "*Le Collectionneur*" - a series of drawings, dated 2012-13, concerning Paris under Nazi occupation- rested. Even at a remove of more than sixty years, French public opinion has still not finished coming to terms with the anti-Semitic policies of the Vichy government and, in particular, with the administrative-bureaucratic machine that, in the period between 1940 and 1944, efficiently carried out the deportation of Jews and the plundering of their assets. France has never had the sort of controversy about coming to terms with the past (*Historikerstreit*) that marked Germany in the 1980s.

Bauer, born in 1975, began with some photos he found on the Internet. They relate to a historical event he did not experience, but let's allow that it nonetheless reverberates in his personal memory. Thus, in one of several works titled *Le Bal*, 2012, he depicts concentration-camp barracks alongside a scene from Hergés Tintin comic about the expropriation of an Incan mummy from Peru. Bauer eschews color, drawing in pencil, black chalk, and oil paint on various supports (paper, Plexiglas, the wall, even the polished porcelain of flower vases). The gray tones, as well as the drawings' lack of finish and indefinite outlines, are ways not only of mimicking the gaps in historical memory but also of inscribing, on the surface of the support, an internal temporality, a duration specific to the execution of the drawing as well as to its perception. The drawing - as a slow and gradual apparition of the image - comes close to cinema, with the artist taking the place of both projector and viewer. It is no accident that "*Le Collectionneur*" was seen alongside *L'Architecte*, 2012-13, a silent film, mostly in black-and-white, created, like an animation, from thousands of oil paintings on Plexiglas; seventeen similar paintings were on display, but they were not among those that make up the animation.

Set in 1922, the year when F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* debuted in Berlin, Bauer's film tells the story of a boy who, struck with terror by Murnau's vision, glimpses his own future in World War II. Bauer's gray drawings are generated by the encounter, if not the collision, of two antithetical historical perspectives: one looking back at a past the artist never experienced, the other prefiguring a future yet to be confronted by the film's protagonist. This temporal oscillation was balanced by the artist's control of the exhibition space, with four porcelain vases marking its perimeter and two large wall drawings encompassing the gallery architecture. But it was the viewer who allowed the connection between these two views, causing them to converge toward the present, which was not represented at all in "*Le Collectionneur*."

In the drawings, whose emotional distance recalls that of Luc Tuymans's paintings, we note the recurring silent presence of goods that were confiscated from Jews and amassed at the Jeu de Paume and at other storage places in Paris. The expropriated domestic furnishings were stored in the vast halls of museums and made available for shipment to Germany. The embarrassing relationship between museum collections and plunder is barely suggested, yet through drawing, Bauer conjures those repressed memories that still resist reconciliation and resolution in a shared past.

Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.