



## Benoît Maire

Le détail de Cordélia  
2014 bronz  
28 x 20 x 5 cm

Peinture de nuages  
2016 oil paint on canvas  
75 x 100 cm



To me, philosophy and art are like a painting and its frame. Art takes its expression from an unknown source, and philosophy comes and wraps it up, analyses it, builds itself around it like a shell. It was at least the vision I had when I was 20, and that is why I have studied art and philosophy in parallel. I realize today that philosophy is not the paragon of the artistic activity, but that it is as free and creative as art can be. Philosophers are free to invent what they want. Philosophy can be attached to logic and mathematics just as much as it can be detached from reason and grammar. What I can see with the philosopher *Anne-Françoise Schmid*, who I am currently working with, is the creation, the resort to fiction, and it is this type of philosophy that I'm interested in. At the moment, in my work, I tend to be more of a craftsman than I used to be. I used to make conceptual and linguistic objects while now I make paintings, sculptures. I'm getting closer to matter, and then one could say I'm getting closer from art. I realize that the artist's work is to conceive objects and to put them forward; to be a producer of objects, even if they are immaterial.

Among what I display, there are objects that I have made myself as well as collected ones. At the moment, I'm using the huge *Strombus giga* shells — pink in the inside and beige on the outside — which, depending on the time they have spent dead in the water, are more or less damaged and have different textures. I'd rather buy a shell than make a ceramic, because nature has given it a shape which interests me for its or-



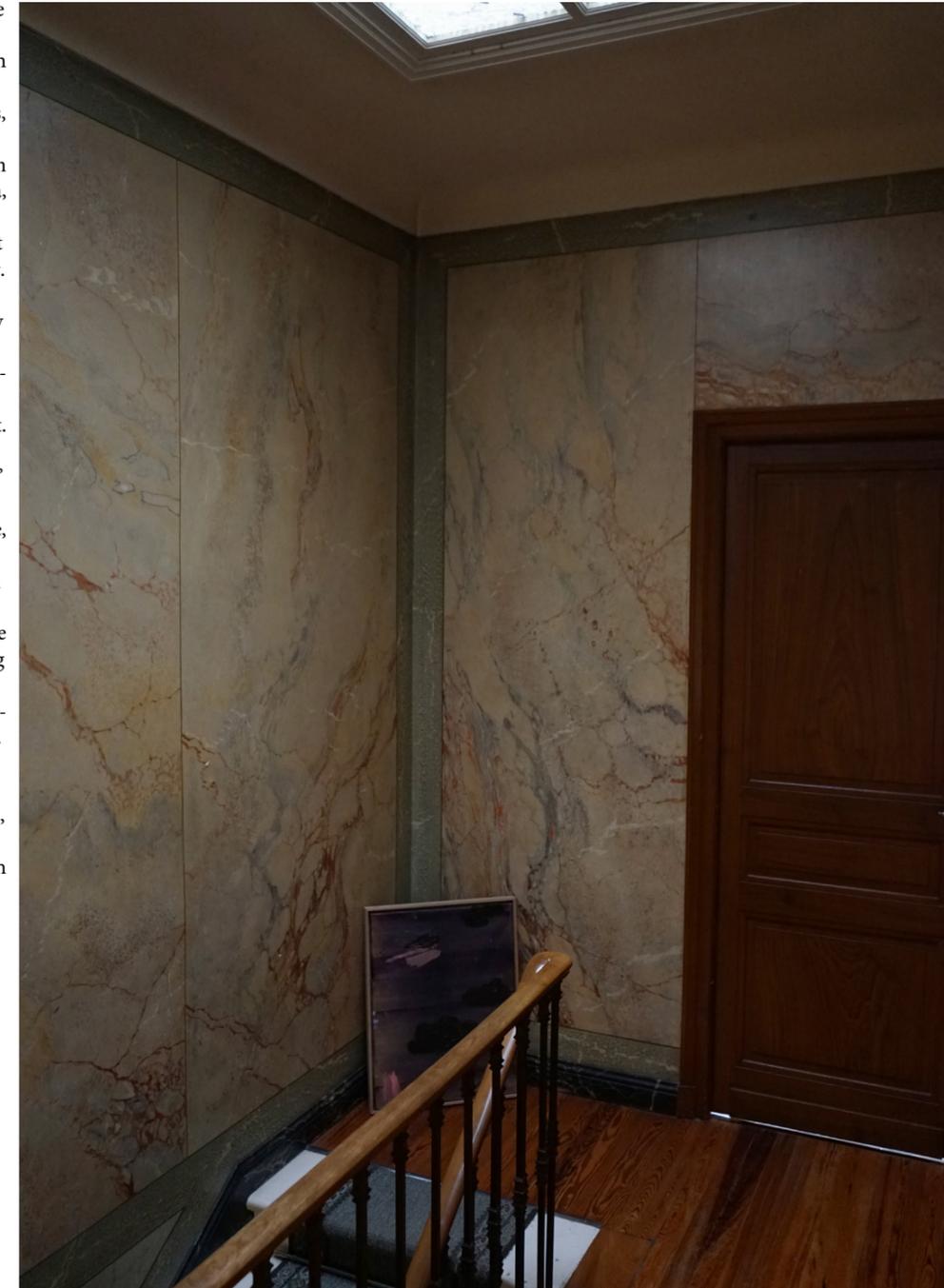
Peinture de nuages 2017  
oil paint on canvas  
100 x 150 cm

Peinture de nuages 2016  
oil paint on canvas  
100 x 150 cm

ganicity and the metaphors it may suggest. Some things that happen to fall under our eyes, on the Internet or in our hands, can be combined with things we have made.

At the beginning of a project or a series, there is always an axiom, a truth that I submit to experimentation. In that sense, my practice can be considered philosophical. When I have an idea, I make the piece and see if the axiom can work with it. For instance, I have made sculptures that looked like tools, and I have called them *Weapons*. When I step on the bathroom scale and I notice how much I weigh, I get the knowledge of my weight in kilograms. A scale is a tool. If you extrapolate, you realize that we are destroying ourselves with tools that are calculating and measuring us, as only one element is taken into account. In my car, I used to listen to the *Little Prince* saying "Grown-ups always ask: 'How old is he?' 'How much money does he make?' 'How big is his house?'" Adults are supposed to be reasonable, and yet they have this need to quantify. The grown-up grasps things and takes hold of them by measuring them. My axiomatic is to say that one tool of measure is a type of destruction of the real. It annihilates the other possibilities of seeing or apprehending an object, because measures prevent people from accessing other types of perception. Here is why these series are called *Weapons*.

The idea of an axiom spontaneously comes to my mind, when I am riding my bike, reading, or watching something. At the moment, I am working on a series untitled *Castle*. They are composed of structures made of brass in which



Peinture de nuages 2016  
oil paint on canvas  
50 x 65 cm



objects are inserted, such as a *Strombus giga* shell or a ball of fossilized wood, holding in equilibrium. I had decided to place a natural object next to a man-made one. And with the first castle made in Mexico, I realized that the structure itself had already been man-made; so I have only kept the shell. I questioned myself on the distinctions between nature and culture. In the castles, the sculpture is man-made, but brass is not. It is when I tried to schematize the nature/culture relationship and to represent the confrontation between which is man-made and which is made by nature that I realized that the distinction was obsolete and ineffective in my sculpture. I then questioned myself on the intrinsic qualities of these objects I had chosen without particular reasons, or for their symbolic metaphors perhaps. In the castles, the axiom is emerging but I still haven't found it.

I have started my *Clouds* paintings in 2012, five years ago, without knowing why. Since then, I have defined my axiom: "every painting is a cloud painting". Whatever painting it is, even if it is an apple on a table by *Cézanne*, clouds are what is painted. If I distance myself from the iconicity of the painting, I will see an apple, but if I come closer to a dozen of centimeters, I will see clouds – the iconicity, the sign will be gone. In the sky, you can see clouds, and in these you can see things like in paintings, abstract paintings especially. When I was a kid, there was a room in the *Centre Pompidou* that was full of abstract paintings where a man was showing a painting to his wife while saying "Look, there is a horse here." He had sensed the idea of represen-

tation, and thus the iconicity, and he thought he had understood or grasped the painting. It had shocked me because it was an abstract painting, which was not supposed to represent anything. In fact, this man was operating with the abstract painting as you would operate with the sky and clouds. They are spaces of projection. So here the axiom would be: "all art is a cloud". Axioms are not made to be true, but they are powerful.

The viewers may or not find the axioms in my works. I don't believe in comprehending. I think you prehend with. Because when someone comprehends, it means they have stopped their reception process, whereas in art your reception of a same artwork you like can differ whether your age. You do not comprehend a work of art, you grasp it in a certain way. For instance, I have always appreciated *Odilon Redon*, but for different reasons depending on the times. There is no comprehending of an axiom or of an abstract canvas. I am not even sure that philosophy comprehends itself, but it is a position. I read philosophy books that I do not comprehend. Comprehending is just stopping at some point. Philosophy is not to be comprehended, just like art I see. That means that I do not stop.

As a viewer, I first leafed through books, got interested in art history, went to museums. I saw lots of artworks but I did not own them. Now, I'm interested in artworks and signed designer pieces, which I have with me daily. I am not so much interested in art history anymore, but I like to place some signed pieces in the space my body is in. It is a matter of presence. It would not

have been the case before, but now I might be interested in owning a *Gauguin*, in having it around me at home. The fact that the pieces are signed is like a summoning. For instance, to have at home a ceramic salad serving set designed by *Jean Derval* is a kind of presence, when you focus on the way it is done. It is like having a party with friends. A piece of art is a mark of a time of thinking, of a time of working. There is a sort of humanity in the piece you see. I think that it is *Bruno Latour* who sometimes analyses objects in that way. When I am eating a modern salad – one of those which are sold in a packing – I also eat the fact that it was in a factory, was cut by a worker and vacuum packed with the chance that the plastic used was recycled. What is part of an object is not only what you see. Take for instance the *Jean Derval's* cup I have here: it is not only enameled stoneware, it is also transportation, the time the artist has spent on it, etc. I used to be more distant before, I would be more interested in the piece inscription. Now I am interested in their presence qualities in daily life. And if I see *Twombly* in a museum, I see the presence. I feel it for a moment.

I had a very powerful aesthetic experience in 2003, in a collection exhibition of the *Lugwig Museum* in Italy, which was curated by *Francesco Bonami*. In this exhibition was one of *Tino Sehgal's* first works. It was fleeting and minimal. A watchman of the room would do a small arm movement and then say the artist's name and read the rest of the work's cartel out loud. Seeing him destroyed the other works present in the exhi-

bition, which I immediately found less powerful. They were static, while *Tino Sehgal's* work was startling. Looking at it would trigger the performance – it was an event, a living one, and it was stronger than the artworks. As I kept on going, I saw *The Nose* by *Giacometti*. It is a head sculpture with, instead of the nose, a very long rod extending beyond the suspended cage in which the sculpture is placed. When I saw the piece, I thought that it resisted *Tino Sehgal's* work, and that it had an eventlike aspect in it as well. *Eric Troncy* had organized an exhibition at *Almine Rech's* in which he would place paintings next to one other. The eye would see ten artworks at one glance and would directly choose the ones it perceives as stronger. There was, in fact, a fight between the works in the room, which stated a sense of presence. The *Tino Sehgal* clearly belongs to the ontology of the event – it happens – and that is why it destroys all the other works that belong to an ontology of representation. Although *Giacometti's* piece does not resort to the event system, it seems both timeless and static, and I have found in it the ability to resist *Tino Sehgal's*.

I am currently making furniture, especially for the architecture group *Ker-Xavier* that was created by my wife *Marie Corbin* and two other architects. I principally make tables and chairs. In my artistic work, I was already interested in pieces of furniture as sculptural spaces, and now I'm interested in shapes and in the matter being constrained by function. You must be able to seat on a chair as you must be able to cut a gigot on a table. To summarize my approach, I first used



Castle 2017  
brass strombus giga shell  
16 x 32 x 48 cm

to produce immaterial things constrained by concepts: texts, conferences, etc. Then I began to produce artworks constrained by ideas, mythologies and stories. I would confront my freedom of expression with what I believed to be its paragon. I have always placed my work in a dialectic of what falls away from us and what catches it again. At the beginning, my work dealt with the immaterial piece constrained by philosophy and concepts, then it was by history and mythology, and now, when I make furniture, it is about shapes constrained by function. The exhibition I currently setting up at the CAPC [Contemporary Art Museum of Bordeaux] for 2018 is untitled *Thèbes*. Thèbes is a city of which entrance was guarded by a sphinx, who was set free by *Oedipus* when he succeeded answering her riddle. For this exhibition, I am using the mythological story as an element that is proper to express, and thus proper to constrain forms, as well as axioms and furniture. So I am not really navigating from one point to another – every element complements each other. The pieces are separated and constrained by different elements, and in the exhibition all of this adds up. You can see shapes constrained by a concept, mythology, history, or function.