

Three Failed Attempts To Elucidate

ON AXEL MALIK (*1953)

A page, populated by figures: hundreds of them, running at full speed, suggesting a mode of life at once cerebral and sensible, drawn one at a time, each given shape, just like the one before, by chance details. Always in haste, the figures extend the horizontal line towards other lands, only to be arrested by the margins and spaces of the page, which seem like partitions or the weave of fabric. Others, suspended vertically, like slackened or tangled springs (or twine, barbed wire, lace, filaments, strands of fabric), align their delicate thinness, skipping and curling.

As these traits without depth – yet not without life – continue to project themselves before us, one after another, we try to read. We try to read a page. We expected writing, familiar territory. Not for long. We were in error!

That slows the eye. In its doubt, it abandons its habitual, blind reading movement. Yet, disoriented by not being able to decipher what turned out not to be writing, the eye, so used to deducing a conclusive meaning, can now only question. There's something that's not to be read, but to be seen, in the scanning of these graphical apparitions from which sculpted events have ssurged, without the least regard for linguistic units. Letters, words, symbols? They mean nothing here! The strokes ordered by the concentrated thrusts of the hand, each one unique, have invaded and conquered the sacred space of the page of writing, but not in order to write, and above all not to recount anything.

We have no choice but merely look: without thinking of symbols, without casting a net to catch meaning or thought. We realize there's a function of the figure that's not signified and is not to signify. But if it even if it doesn't signify, perhaps these traits still represent? The eye, momentarily reassured, approaches again and, taking a closer look, searches for resemblances: aren't we looking at dancers, horses, lovers, cats, insects? But the resemblances don't last. They blur. The eye's lost, no longer knows how to untangle the butterflies caught in the fine mesh of the net. The grid is without intention, without image.

Let's try a different strategy. We approach the artist, discretely, ask him, since he's told us his hand

inks these pages the way others write their private diaries. "Tell us, Mr Malik...?" (Here we go – now we're finally going to understand!) "What do they recount, these figures? What emotion do they record? What were you thinking of?" However, the answer comes back: "Of nothing. The spirit, empty, blank. The tracing hand: set free." The gesture flows from the hand. A blank space, a silence; it resumes. As it is deployed, the ink transposes the infinitesimal, accelerated circling motions. The eye has learned to digress, to move from one frustration to another.

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(TRANSLATION BY JAMES BURTON)