

Text on Erika Harrsch paintings by Xavier Canonne

"Life, what is it, but a dream" Lewis Carroll

Alice, who falls down a bottomless hole in pursuit of the white rabbit, discovers not only another world. In her fall, a cloud of butterflies, flying fish, steel dragonflies, a flowering of ink and fire escape from her raised skirts between her slender legs in patent-leather shoes.

The quelled revolts, the childhood wounds, the silence imposed on little girls, the menstrual blood, the pain of women are uncovered and consumed in these great explosions while she falls and is transformed. Under the apparent seduction, breasts up, thighs spread, it is a world of revolt where we see joy and anger, the unleashing of the senses, while playing cards, wrestlers' masks, good conduct codes, and confessors' manuals rain down. She will now draw her lessons from erotic magazines and licentious literature, sweeping away all the rest: the schoolgirl in white socks puts on stockings and garters, arms herself with soft leather and thigh-high boots to come plant her heels in the heart of men, in the heart of time. Moving forward while masked, losing her head but keeping her reason, that could be the motto of the woman who has just left everything, the woman who does not want to look behind herself, towards the past that was preordained for her.

She will never again be the victim, but rather the organizer of tragic celebrations, the flower and the hummingbird, the flame and the detonator. At her touch, the wings of butterflies open, awakening in the daytime by unfurling intimate folds and we see men kneel. But she is not driven by any cruelty: her shadow grows with her, defying the past that constrains her and yet still nourishes her, a gentle Amazon seeking beauty and love. How can one put so much anger into a butterfly's wing, so much revolt behind a smile? No cruelty, but rather the demand for happiness, since we must forget everything, go back to the beginning, always start over.

A strong, healthy wind blows through the works of Erika Harrsch; they are fragmented, in constant formation, they are animated by collages, painted scraps, lines drawn like ropes to assemble these scattered elements. A world offered up, always in movement, a placental world, these great fluids carry fragments seeking to be united, to merge. Sometimes as observed with a microscope, sometimes appearing to float in weightlessness, pushing back the limits of the painting, they refute any concept of scale, the infinitely small mixing here with the scraps of a pulled-apart newspaper. The explosion is beautiful only because it proves to be useful, because it announces the great hoped-for changes, the new epoch when it will be good to live and love free of any constraint. All the work of Erika Harrsch bears witness to this enterprise of liberation that makes her sometimes atypical: in an era when art suppresses its feelings, wraps itself in theoretical discourse to restrict any effusion, she has committed herself to this simplicity, this sincerity, by adopting the most direct figurative form, mixing techniques to state the sensuality and beauty of desire, of carnal love. Her figures make way for the world as they rise up before her, stage as much as mirror, and if they light fires, it is to await the day, just like the heroines in the paintings by Gustave Moreau, who are watching out for a thousand traps.

But let there be no mistake: the work of Erika Harrsch is not a feminist work - the latest manifestation of an "artist's anger" -, nor is it a female work - in the sense reserved for literature for young girls, for example - but rather of the freest expression, a love song, in all its power and violence.

Peace will return, that is certain, all combat pacified on the path of love, when raised stones will become as light as colored balloons. Then, in the silence regained, every Manhattan dawn will be painted red and gold and we will hear the sirens singing on the East River.