

Nino Kapanadze: Behind the Curtain

Guillaume Oranger

It seems that painting has never stopped being about mystery. From Sulawesi (where the first known images made by mankind have been found, in caves ornated by figures of animals and hunt scenes drawn about 67,800 years ago) to Andrei Rublev (Russian icon painter born in 1360, who died in 1430), which is to say from its oldest known origin, in pictorial closeness to nature, to what still may be its highest iconic accomplishment, the closest to surrounding the sacred with form, it hasn't been about fully knowing the world. The decisive part of painting, on the contrary, has been what could not be grasped, the movability, or immateriality, of the depicted; an outside of the image that doesn't involve framing, but the invisible by nature.

One could divide the work of Kapanadze, a Georgian painter born in 1990 in Tbilisi, into four directions. The icon, which she still produces in its everlasting tradition, embellishes the work with gold and hangs it in the high corners of a room. The content of her reference is not modified, nor altered or interpreted, but brought to the closest possible degree of resemblance. This is how tradition is maintained. Abstraction, the result of her experimentations on pigments, boiling them to dilution, letting them evolve on the canvas with a very small level of control, in comparison with the icon. Cavalcades, or translations of the horse's gallop in abstract terms, are reminiscent of the famous series of photographs entitled "Cheval au galop," made by Eadweard Muybridge in 1887. Then figuration, in its broadest sense, lingering on details of the world thought of as worthy of interest, attention.

These four directions could in turn become two: the sacred, embodied by the painting of icons and touched on by abstraction, and the worldly, in which the cavalcades fall, as well as the better part of Kapanadze's figuration. There is, nonetheless, a side of her figuration that seems to belong to the worldly less than to the sacred, since here seems to lie the curtain in her work: showing the viewer what cannot be seen, although not through display, or even the aforementioned framing, but through setting. Just like the cavalcades convey a sense of link between painting and photography, the curtain paintings, as we will call them, convey one between the material and the immaterial. They can lean toward abstraction at times, figuration at others, yet they remain something beyond this distinction: a way of including what is behind, what remains unseen, hidden, untouched, but only thought of or felt in the world. The fallings of water in considerable proportions have the same veiling effect, this one natural rather than manufactured, although with the curtain as much as with the waterfall, to know what is behind entails going through it, around it, or to pierce it.

The curtain and the waterfall have something else in common: they both fall, their shape determined by the center of the Earth and the consequent gravity, which is to say, the physical effect on life at its surface. Their unfolding, either still or perpetual, seems as important as their folding, the vertical cavities influenced by height and flow, the wrinkles of space rhythming their aspect. A painter such as Kapanadze could even see the two as being, in the realm of painting, closer than they are in real life, one being a substitute for the other as much as it is the thing it is in itself, their common points overtaking their differences. In any case, both being about what is behind them more than about what is before them, Kapanadze would hereby connect her imagery to what would become the true subject of her painting, mystery, as it seems to be the true subject of devotional, sacred painting. One could here remember, at the evocation of links between the curtain and the sacred, these links being thrillingly scary, the dawn of the second season of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*. The big room, infinitely covered with red curtains; the invisible curtain in the material world behind which Bob is to be found. On this note, it is even said of Gustave Courbet's *The Origin of the World*, painted in 1866 and now in the collections of the Orsay Museum in Paris, that it was hung by its then-possessor Jacques Lacan,

as originally intended, behind a curtain that the youngest members of his family, when coming of age, would take a guilty pleasure in lifting for visiting friends. One then shall not consider the curtain as being innocent, free of danger, ignorant of what it removes from the sight of the beholder; on the contrary, it would be as if the curtain would wear in itself that which it doesn't show, bearing the weight of the visual tragedy it sets.

When beholding the characteristic softness of Kapanadze's touch, the way her colors lean toward pastels, the way her forms are gently shaking, just so that their contours brush past indistinctiveness, about to blend with their backdrop, it may seem far-fetched to understand them in tragic terms, to believe that something dangerous, menacing, is at play. Yet there is indeed an unresolved tension entailing more than the frivolous combinations of forms, the light and inconsequential arrangements of content. Conversely, what seems to be at stake is the status of the painted image in our time, its possibility of changing a life, a belief about the world, a relationship with one's surroundings. Behind Kapanadze's curtain, there is always more than it seems.

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