

Claude Domec

1902 - 1981

Beyond The Silent World,
Reaching Through Visions
of
The Seine.

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Au-dela du mode silencieux,
Atteindre les visions
de
la Seine.

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Translator's Note

...a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife.
—Walter Benjamin

The translation from French to English of this extensive interview¹ given by the painter Claude Domez in 1976 to Ghislaine de la Villeguerin and Guy Beaumont shares his wonders, humility, and studio practices. Claude Domez's voice and insights are a jewel of clarity in the cacophony of the contemporary art scene today. At times, I have thought of this project as the translation of a Buddhist *Terma*. *Terma* are texts of teachings literally meaning “treasure” intended for troubled times as a source of renewed wisdom and blessings.

I was first introduced to Claude Domez's work by his granddaughter, Mathilde Rousseau Domez on a warm September evening in 2017 in the village of Marnay-sur-Seine, France. The passion and dedication of this artist's vision was palpable in the room. His paintings, 36 years after his death were whispering their mystery in translucent colors. Claude Domez used bee's wax as medium in his painting as did I. But, as I was to discover later, he used it in a very different way, a way known only to him, his greatest secret. The paintings were filled with trees and rivers, and vegetal beings. Skies unfolded in translucent color holding mythical creatures and life forms of the imagination. It was the translucency and unpredictability of the paintings that had me spell bound. That evening will never leave me.

Upon my return to the United States, I set out to find out all that I could about Claude Domez. After a long search, I was able to obtain a copy of this interview and a catalogue of his works held in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Dijon, France.

¹ Found in the 1981 Spring-Summer issue of *Les Cahiers Bleu*. The BLUE NOTEBOOKS.

Translation is an art form and discipline unto itself. I was guided in this work by Emmanuelle Pourroy, Director of Education at the Alliance Francaise in Denver, Colorado. Emmanuelle's rich academic experience in the humanities and French Literature instilled in me the importance in honoring both the flavor of the French language used at the time of the interview (1976) and the necessity of bringing the English equivalency to the non-French reader without compromising the meaning. I committed myself to searching for just the word to capture the meaning of what had been translated and honoring the rich afterlife of Claude Domec's words. Later, I was able to go through the translation with Nicole Domec, Claude's daughter. I will be forever grateful to her for all she generously shared of the intricacies of French, titles used by Claude, his life and paintings.

In the first days of this project I acquainted myself with the poetry of Robert Desnos (1900-1945). Desnos was a long time friend of Claude Domec's and Claude shares conversations he had with Desnos in the interview. Another important guide for me in the translation process are the words of poet Carolyn Forché, a translator of *The Selected Poems of Robert Desnos*.²

I take comfort from Walter Benjamin's meditations on the translator's work: that we labor in a field of broken shards, and retrieving each fragment, we attempt to piece together a work that will never resemble the original. As a restored vessel will never hold water, my English versions of Desnos's poems will never again hold the music and resonance of the French. Benjamin counsels us that "Unlike a work of literature, translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at the single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one." My task, as I began to perceive it, was not to translate Desnos's French into my English, but to translate my English into the poetry of Desnos.

² Forché, Carolyn & Kulik, William. *The Selected Poems of Robert Desnos*. The Ecco Press. N.Y. 1991.

It was a matter of translating one epoch of human apprehension into another, one mind into another, of allowing myself to be inhabited by the spirit of a poet distanced by time, history, extremity . . . It was rather like the task of conjuring a ghost.³

And so it is with me. I found myself immersed in learning more about the times of Claude Domec's life. The gift of amazing conversations with people who knew him have given me insights that can only be carried in the remembrances of the human spirit. I carried all of this with me into my own studio. I began to work with the dried pigments he talked about. I returned to Marnay sur Seine in the fall of 2018. I spent over two months in the Domec family archive where his paintings, sketches, photographs and personal papers are held. The more I studied his paintings; photographing them, writing about them, observing them with my painter's eye and soul, the more I realized that his method of using wax was very different from what I initially thought. I developed a discipline of research in the archive in the mornings and painting in his atelier overlooking the Seine in the afternoons and evenings. My first week there, I carefully went through the many pigment powders left in his studio, indexing each one in a Japanese scroll book. I sorted through his brushes and mark making tools that he designed and found an open package of the bees wax that he used. Shaped into beautiful discs, a bee embossed on each piece. Replicating his materials, using cold wax and pigments with linseed oil, I experienced a very different growth edge in my own work. It continues to be a mesmerizing journey for me as an artist, researcher and scholar. I learned from allowing myself to be inhabited by the spirit of an artist who lived authentically in one of the most destructive times of history and yet never lost the ability to embrace all that was around him.

My initial purpose for undertaking this translation was to get to know more of Claude Domec. It has become a journey of responding to his paintings and words across the distance of time and circumstance. Translation, I have come to learn, has much to teach me as an artist. . . . translating one

³ Ibid. p. xii - xiii

epoch into another, one mind into another, allowing myself to be inhabited by the experience of encounter.

Irene F. Sullivan
Wind's Edge Studio
November 2018

Introduction⁴

As in a dream. Myths Found.

Claude Domec is not well known as a painter. Art history has a long and repetitive practice of neglecting artists - artists - in the strongest sense of the word, who are neglected while other artists are praised in the contemporary scene, getting attention thanks to the “concordance of frantic media and crazes of the world”. Often the commercialization that the artist chooses to indulge in or the *m’astuvuism* (“did you see me -ism”) filled with things that are banal, superfluous and entertaining is what triggers awe in crowds.

It is for us, regional museums, not to succumb to the monopoly of larger urban museums. We need to be up to the challenge and not forget the isolated artists who enrich our soil by a production possessing all the signs of authenticity in spite of the silence that surrounds them or perhaps thanks to this fundamental quality of wanting to create. Just like prayer, which is something said only in silence, the act of creation germinates only through the negation of noise that the world makes around it. For it is another world that the painter proposes, almost out of time or out of time away from spatial contingencies in the environment.

This serves only as the lure, from the starting point which disappears in the act of painting or carving so that this new world unfolds, distinct from the ordinary everyday world we live in.

Claude Domec is a countryman living on his land, on the banks of the Seine. This is his inspiration. The Seine overflows her banks during many months of the year into the nearby forest. The painter, navigating his boat, finds the way to his dream, meets the mythological geniuses, recreates his gaze of sparkling blue and the myths that the non-reflective are unable to perceive. This distance from the city noise, from the chapels of art and

⁴ The Introduction was written by Pierre Granville - Conservateur de la Section d’Art Moderne et Contemporain au Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon.

especially the trade which watches it, makes it easier to understand the reasons of the painter who is both independent from, and foreign to, current artistic movements. Is it not the same response of the Court of Luneville⁵ in a similar situation, which buried for three centuries a George de la -Tour⁶, the painter gentleman living seriously on his land, who cared little for Paris and rarely put foot in the Court (of Luneville)?

Similarly to analyze the work of Claude Domec from the worlds of current painting, there are two elements. Two aspects ending up as one.

First, the use of a new or at least rediscovered painting technique. With the exception of paintings done from 1924 to 1938 in oil paint like everyone else painting at the time, Claude Domec rediscovered painting with wax as a result of chance work in the field of restoration. The wax, white wax - not to be confused with encaustic - becomes not only a personalized means but also a kind of matter that has its sublimity in purity. Domec's research leads him through formulas that he keeps secret. His first wax paintings were completed in 1939. From that time, as demonstrated in the famous **Pegasus** (coll.part, Stockholm) replica of **Pegasus**, oil, 1927 admired by Robert Desnos⁷ to the point that these paintings inspired a beautiful poem by Desnos. Claude Domec, in the mastery of the use of wax, opened a certain enlightenment similar to the "old painters" use of glaze. This is rarely used in contemporary painting to recreate the transparency of spaces, the fluidity of the incommensurable, this unique quality that is the unspoken of the natural world around us.

The white wax of bees asleep in winter, is subtly incorporated into the colored pigments. It is a kind of clandestine marriage of the mineral with

⁵ A renowned resort of the 18th century. The Grand Chateau de Luneville built in 1702 where followers of the Enlightenment ; Voltaire, Rousseau, Morrellet visited.

⁶ La Tour (1593 - 1652), a French Baroque painter, painted in his studio in the town of Luneville where he and his entire family died in an epidemic in 1652. His work was forgotten until rediscovered in 1915. Some of La Tour's work was confused with Vermeer.

⁷ R. Desnos, famous poet, member of the resistance. Died in 1945 at the age of 45 just after the liberation of the Terezin deportation camp.

animal secretion. This mixture is obviously modest, and the usual tubes of paint are no longer seen in Claude Domec's workshop. The modesty of this medium is accompanied simultaneously by the modesty of the man.

Secondly, it is not that this modesty lacks a certain ambition, but that it seeks to reach through the foundational vision of thought that includes the timelessness of old myths. This is inspiration seeking to dig rather than to figure out (underscore mine) the forms of nature by discovering through a concealment of character that is not a feigned zoomorphism⁸ and an anthropomorphism⁹ as transparent as it is hidden. These ("GEOGONIES")¹⁰, the painter's invented words, design the order of the forms that arise from the chaos of the earth. At the same time the emergence of thoughts that these forms suggest are allegorical gods or demi-gods of our hopes and our despair. A pagan world? If you will, but one which goes well beyond a representation of the saturation of admirable examples of antiquity.

Beyond that, Claude Domec's thought is constantly supported and impregnated by thought that goes beyond the limits imposed by a carved sculpture of antiquity. It is thought nourished by great thinkers; Heraclitus¹¹, Empedolce¹², Plato¹³, Aristotle¹⁴.

⁸ *Art that imagines humans as other-than-human animals or art that portrays one species of animal with another species of animal.*

⁹ *Attribution of human traits, emotions or intentions to other-than-humans.*

¹⁰ *This is an invented word. It has to do with forms that are dug out rather than thought out.*

¹¹ *Heraclitus (of Ephesus) c. 535 - 475 BCE. Pre-socratic Greek philosopher. "Ever present change is a fundamental essence of the universe." "No one ever steps in the same river twice."*

¹² *Empedolce 495 - 430 BCE. Pre-socratic philosopher and poet from Sicily. Originated the the cosmogenic theory of the 4 elements. - all things are fitted together and constructed out of these, and by means of them they think, feel pleasure and pain.*

¹³ *427 - 347 BCE. Greek Philosopher. Student of Socrates, teacher of Aristotle, influenced by Heraclitus.*

¹⁴ *384 - 322 BCE. Greek Philosopher. Originator of the field of Logic and the Scientific Method.*

However Claude Domez's painting is not a course in philosophy, it remains strictly painting, which in no way precludes that these raw, sane, or delirious ways of philosophical thinking can't be used in the pleasure of our viewing his works. His is the approach of the mystery of painting, without coy confusion.

There is one point that should not be overlooked, namely the coexistence beside the actual pictorial language of the artist and the language of titles which is personal. To him, these titles are not, with the exception of "landscapes" which speak for themselves, the product of a whim. For Domez, they are evident, but for the reader, eager to deepen the hidden meaning of a word that looks like a proper name, it presents some difficulty. The word highlights the idea that was the starting point, springing from the painting. Most often, this keyword comes from a contraction of several other names. For example "CALLIADE" is interpreted as a contraction of the the name of the famous architect Callias¹⁵, glorified by Homer, and the suffix -iade from the Iliad.¹⁶ There is also a mind bending imaginary landscape construction of phonetic association alluding to heat.¹⁷ The conjunction of various elements in a way becomes a "play on words". Once again, a kind of symbiosis, an active element of painting.

Another example of this "Tiresic¹⁸ Language" and its double title of "Pantapodion": the prefix 'Pan' (meaning the whole), the first two syllables of 'Apollo' and the first syllable of 'Dyonisis' revealing the internal conflict of the language of the clairvoyant Tiresias¹⁹ caught between the

¹⁵ Greek, 4th cent. BCE.

¹⁶ Ancient Greek Epic poem attributed to Homer.

¹⁷ The French words *chaleur* = warmth, *architecte* = architect, *calor* = calorie.

¹⁸ Tiresias, a clairvoyant blind prophet of Apollo in Thebes from Greek Mythology. Was transformed into a woman for 7 years by Hera. Mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey*, also featured in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*

serenity of Apollo and the debauchery of Dyonisis²⁰ “lolie”, easier to decipher signifies a kind of pun, the country of “lo” mixed with “joy”. Would Domec be having fun in referring to Picasso’s paintings in 1914, in which “Ma Jolie” , the collage of the refrain of a popular song of the time²¹ used as a pretext for a Cubist composition? Surely, **The mirror of the woods** Coll.part.), **The way of the waters** (Museum of Fine Arts, Dijon), **The high water** (acquired by the Cultural Action Center Thibaud de Champagne, Troyes) ²² say what they are saying, as does **Medusa** (Museum of Israel, Jerusalem) petrifies with horror and seizes with fright, any one who stares at her.

Finally we will not fail to emphasize the importance of the moving painting; **L’Ange Blessé (The Wounded Angel)** — 1942. Painted while the painter was in forced exile in the United States - in which he recreated from afar with as much passion and tenderness of vision his **Petit Lyre**,²³ Marnay-sur-Seine visited by the wounded angel depicting France in it distress. These so called “landscapes” are beyond figurative representation. These are the expressions of a man possessing the sense of a fluid current which is the time of water and the relative permanence of a tree trunk moving towards the sky.

In fact, the woods inhabit the painting as in the multiple sense that the word possesses: the forest which faces its abode beyond the river- with the anguish that constitutes for the painter the foresight of the felling of the trees to make room for the vastness of the tower of the nuclear power plant²⁴, while these trees are in short, the companions of his life. Their

²⁰ See F. Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*. (1886).

²¹ “Ma jolie” (my pretty girl) Paris, 1911-1912 Picasso. The refrain of a popular song performed at a Parisian music hall frequented by Picasso. Also the nickname for Marcela Humbert, Picasso’s lover at the time.

²² All paintings of Claude Domec.

²³ According to Nicole Domec, Claude’s daughter, this painting and title was influenced by the sonnet *Heureux qui come Ulysse a fait un long voyage*. By Joachim du Bellay (1558).

²⁴ The Nuclear power plants of Nogent.

wood alone is itself a living knowledgeable material. Domec has the knowledge of the species, knowing how to handle a chisel like the adze²⁵. The shaping of the triptychs, that of the **Cosmic Diamond** forming an icosahedron²⁶ - culmination and search for a philosopher's stone where the four elements from the base to the top are superimposed in agreement with the earth. The fire, the water and air - shows well the craftsmanship of the artist whose love is manifest from contact with the wood. Claude Domec's gift is an intimate allegiance between the artist and the craftsman, and their complementarity determines the originality of his creation.

Originality? Some will see in the work of Domec a nod to surrealism. He was detached from that group and the "popisme"²⁷ of Andre Breton. Then there is reminiscences of the old masters. His paintings can evoke a Patinier²⁸ or a Momper²⁹ or other Flemish painters which he does not claim. Claude Domec wants to be, as he says, a man of the East, meaning that the southern magenta light that so many painters love, is NOT his light. If there is a painter whose vision he can be compared to, it is Altdorfer,³⁰. The "Danubian school" is perhaps his school, only to the extent that a real painter is never part of an extended school in academia. Claude Domec's visionary quality is unmistakable, his unpretentious gaze dives beyond the silent world that surrounds us. The world that he makes his own speaks without stirring the lips and the receptacle of our sensitive thought can vibrate to the touch of a vision that does not belittle our small perceptions.

²⁵ A cutting tool shaped like an axe that dates back to the stone age. Used for smoothing or carving wood in hand woodworking.

²⁶ A geometric form with 20 faces, 30 edges, and 12 vertices. One of the five Platonic solids, the one with the most sides, a convex polyhedron.

²⁷ Andre Breton was often referred to as "Pope" because of his autocratic personality.

²⁸ Joachim Patinier (~1515--~1524) Flemish. A pioneer of specialist landscape painting. Influenced Bruegel.

²⁹ Joos de Momper the Younger (1564 - 1635). Flemish. Landscape painter. Influenced by Brueghel.

³⁰ Albrecht Altdorfer (c. 1480 - 1538) German. Painter, engraver and architect of the Renaissance. The main representative of the Danube School.

Moreover, what more or less futile rapport wouldn't we make between such an artist of yesterday and today? Doubtless to the extent that the history of art is complacent in the classification, each artist can have a lineage where he or she does necessarily place themselves. But the learned cast of historians is accustomed to drawer storage. Yes, no doubt, we can see in Claude Domec a descendent of his line of "visionaries", whether they are Hieronimus Bosch³¹, Altdorfer, Gustave Elisheimer, closer to us Rodolphe Bresdin³², Odilon Redon³³ or Gustave Moreau³⁴. This evocation does not belittle in any way his individuality or his personal labor.

Once again, an authentic quality impresses itself without detours, without hindrances, and without the easy pretension shown by so many artists of our time. This is not the case with Claude Domec. He has been able to reach back to the sources of human thought. He is above all a painter, a painter of our abyss and of those of a nature that looks at us, stupefied, when it considers the audacity of an "Icre"³⁵ facing the sun, melting his wings of wax. Symbol, if there is one, but on the other hand, the flight of his work remains incarnated in the wax.

Pierre Granville

Curator of the Section of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Dijon.

³¹ *Hieronimus Bosch (c.1450-1516) Dutch. Painter of fantastic imagery and detailed landscapes.*

³² *Rodolphe Bresdin (1822-1885) French draughtsman and engraver of fantastic works with strange details.*

³³ *Odilon Redon (1840 - 1916) French painter, printmaker, draughtsman and pastelist. French symbolist.*

³⁴ *Gustave Moreau (1826-1898) French. Painter. Major figure in the French Symbolist movement.*

³⁵ *Icarus*

INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE DOMECC

Ghislaine de la Villeguerin (G.V.): Do you always do preparatory work before making your paintings?

Claude Domec (C.D.): Yes, because wax gives the definitive image a path, immediately mysterious, I have never analyzed this . . .but it gives a path to the painter. In spite of everything, the painter is in a kind of conflict between speech and pictorial expression which, it must be said, changes speech. The title of a thing like this: *this is your image*, you title it immediately with words. To definitively stop an idea, it is necessary to imprison it in a word, in a term.

G.V.: When do you decide on the titles of your works? At the beginning?

C.D.: No, but it is the wax that guides me, with its transparency, its world unveils itself to me; it guides me towards an intimacy, of transparency, of flight, of intuition, a range of things not very expressible other than by vision. Speaking is already a kind of support for the idea, for the structure in a sentence. . .The poet has poetic structure and the idea gets in very quickly. For example, I saw Robert Desnos³⁶ working. He showed up at his desk everyday, as does a pianist. Then he wrote 10 verses, alexandrins³⁷ which resembled his intimate thoughts. To imagine, for example rhythms, he had his system. And it's that system, that I . . . We can not say that I imitated it because there was not a common ground between *delire poetique*³⁸ and my painting technique.

³⁶ See F.N. #5

³⁷ A syllabic poetic meter of 12 syllables.

³⁸ "poetic delirium"

G.V.: There are signs that arise from the preparatory work?

C.D.: Yes, we always come back to my understanding of Platonic theory, that black is the neutral color, and white is mother of pearl. So, from this kind of white, you have an astonishing range. You have already seen mother -of-pearl, it is whitish, but inside, there are blues coming up. Taking this into account, there is this phenomenon of the spectrum of the rainbow. . . In neutral color too, there is support, there is the dark range of blues, dark greens, dark reds, that comes to a black, to a kind of tone that calls itself black but is not black. This mixture of those dark blues, those dark reds, those dark yellows, those dark greens which make the darks. You see, for example, the border is black and then all of a sudden it degrades into blue, into pink, into all the colors. And that is why wax is a wonderful element, because once it is used like that, you can rub it and . . .you see the colors appearing in the dark. You see, it is brilliant and it has it's permanent shape. It is like being rewarded for thinking that, and all of a sudden, working on it, comes this image . . .

So these are also landscape stories. It is a seashore, on the side of the sea, on the side of the high banks bathing the coast. It softens, it leaves these darks aside, to arrives at almost transparent colors. I can not say it i mother-of-pearl but it has a tendency to become clear. And it clears up in the mass. It is called **Les Ramparts** (The Fortress). They are inspirations from the transformation of ancient and medieval themes.

G.V.: Can it be scratched?

C.D.: No, it is scratch proof. The wax is not like oil. Once the oil is fixed, it is stable. While warm it has a tender and elastic dimension. The surface of the wax is soft enough for a hard object to shape it, to make an impression. You do not think about it, you see, I went with that . . .it repairs itself easily . . .and the line goes away - with one hand, it is amazing. Your hands serve you to polish your work. I will tell you about two things: the heat of your hand and the moisture of your saliva. You see, I moisten the wax with my saliva. With anything else you destroy it, you break it, but with saliva and the hand you can still shape your painting.

You understand? it is the complete expanse of bricolage³⁹, intellectual bricolage, bricolage hardware, bricolage of the last perfection. *Pleasure is not the act itself...nor is it an intrinsic quality of the act...it is a last perfection which never fails and which is added to it, as to youth its flower...*

Do you know who this is from? Spinoza⁴⁰.

G.V.: We will look at some of your drawings, your sketches.

C.D.: This is the soul and body of Marnay: the great picture of the soul and the body. There are all these animals that escape. Here are the bodies without souls, there are the souls that are mad, finally all the qualities of the souls that I was able to capture in this painting.

G.V.: Do you have the sketch of the painting: **Les deux sources?**

C.D.: I do not know. . .this one is in Dijon . . .It is **Prestant d'Orgue**. At the end of an organ piece, to conclude, we pull the game⁴¹, and it makes a prestant⁴² . . .this is the **Ornuflue**. I wanted to give you an idea of an ordinary approach to painting. The painting with wax requires this kind of spontaneity, that we have captured, that we have expressed, and this is a very small painting. There must not be a big image. Nor should we hope that it is composed according to the principles of pictorial composition.

G.V.: It is almost abstract.

³⁹ *Bricolage has rich meanings rooted in French. It is anything you do working with your hands including patching and mending. Bricolage is understood as a method and not a genre.*

⁴⁰ *Baruch Spinoza. Dutch (1632 - 1677). One of the most important thinkers of the the 17th century. Unity of nature and God. God = Nature = God. The mind and body are two aspects of the same thing. "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare."*

"Peace is not the absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice."

⁴¹ *Organ pulls, used to open the flue pipes of an organ. The pulling of these game create a prestant. See f.n. 41*

⁴² *A rank of open flue pipes on the organ of 4',8' or 16' pitch corresponding to the principle or open diapason stop (game) in French.*

C.D.: Yes, the ideas come out of the matter; I have not civilized them, neither with a term or a word, nor with a kind of memorization. They come, they arise; I sculpt them like a potter who works a ball of clay; all of a sudden it becomes a vase. And let me tell you that the vase is born of the hands of the potter. The potter had an idea, but all of a sudden, the idea becomes deformed and becomes something else. The wax is the same thing. All at once, it begins to stir, to clear, to take a figure; all of a sudden, a glance arises, an arm arises, and it is valid. Now I can show you big pictures.

G.V.: We could start with **Les Oiseaux**.

C.D.: **Les Oiseaux** (The Birds) was an allegory I wanted at the beginning. What I wanted to represent was the birds of Stymphale Lake.⁴³ The birds of Stymphale Lake⁴⁴ are vague like a cosmos for me. If you stick to the legend and take it literally, the birds of Stymphale Lake have a mythical dimension which can be interpreted in different ways: what was Stymphale Lake? What were these birds? Why did they have a malefic dimension, why did Heracles come to the Peloponnese or higher to Thessaly (I do not know anymore) finally in historical Greece? What was the miasma of the marsh . . . did these birds come from an infernal place? Whenever they were seen swirling, it was a sign of death, destruction, public calamity.

G.V.: In what period did you do this painting?

C.D.: I did it almost at the same time as **Desnos and Youki**. I did it before the war. And it was sent to Canada. I had exhibited it in the Tuileries and I was asked to lend it to Canada. It came back just before the war.

G.V.: It is a fantastic picture.

⁴³ A lake in the north-eastern part of Peloponnese, in Corinthia, southern Greece. A protected wetlands area.

⁴⁴ In Greek Mythology, the birds of this lake were monstrous, feeding on human flesh. They used their sharp-pointed feathers as arrows to kill and devour.

C.D.: Do you think?

G.V.: It is fantastic because of these birds, this kind of fight in the sky. It looks like an imaginary pit, a return to prehistoric times.

C.D.: It is curious that you say this, because at the same time there is duality. Do not the ideas that we have of things change and become inaccessible? You see, for example; someone comes to see a painting of a landscape and brings their dog. All of a sudden, in front of the large scale of the painting, the dog will be prey of all the malevolence in the painting, and the person protects the dog. Good...first thing. Secondly, the fisherman comes in the morning to the lakeside, to catch fish. Things are balanced, they have not been troubled by the day's incidents. The fisherman releases his hunting hawk, there are fish in the lake. You understand, it is the malice of life, the malice of intentions; the intentions we have and the intentions we miss, they regularly upset or they become a kind of embarrassment, a kind of misfortune. You are obliged to accomplish the task, but it does not make sense. You tell me it is an anecdote, a story...we imagine, this. . .but it can also be a kind of error or a delusion. You understand, the myth. . . . it is also hidden.

G.V.: What was your intention when you did this painting?

C.D.: The intention was to praise Greek Lyricism, it is obvious in the legend. For example, in the works of Hercules there is always a kind of symbol: the stables of Augias⁴⁵. . . for me, I move forward in this mountainous landscape of Thessaly⁴⁶ or Epirus⁴⁷, which has been seen throughout our classical history in the Epitome Historiae Graecae or in the

⁴⁵ *The stables of Augeas. The fifth task of Hercules was to clean this stable of over 1,000 animals; sheep, cows, horses and goats in one night.*

⁴⁶ *Known as Aeolia in Homer's Odyssey. Town in northern Greece between Epirus and the Aegean Sea. Home of extensive Neolithic culture.*

⁴⁷ *Ancient Greek state located in north-west Greece.*

landscapes like those of Poussin.⁴⁸ I was educated aesthetically. At home, we always had books on art and as a child I always had this view of antiquity; monumental, well-structured, with incredibly strong characters, incredibly diverse, made for History. They were recognizable and I always thought: why shouldn't I make a picture with historical contradictions in it and even so with something classical? Paint mountains worn by time and the ravages of nature without risk until it is finished?

G.V.: If we can go to the next painting, a landscape of wood and water. What date is this from?

C.D.: This painting may be from 46-47, when I came back from America. When I came back from America. the French countryside was completely deserted. There was no mechanization. During the time of the Germans, nothing was done, no public works. People came back. We came back with two little girls, who went to Marnay school. Then the Seine took a different course and we were in the flood in this primitive country that I knew, well before the war, in my childhood, which was always the land of enchantments and values so sublime that it made the river, the Seine, a species of majesty. It was thanks to the Seine that Paris had been there, it was thanks to the Seine that there had been the island of France . . .I was devoted to the Seine with a pagan adoration. It is painted with very few colors, which let the white shades of transparency come through from the background. It does not look like watercolor or pastel. What does this wax painting look like to you?

G.V.: It makes me think about some glazes.

C.D. In oil?

G.V.: No, made with glazes.

⁴⁸ Nicolas Poussin (1594 - 1665). Classical French Baroque painter known for clarity, order and preferring line over color, major influence on painters into the 20th century.

C.D.: But glazes made with what, with what material? Does it seem watery to you? or oleaginous⁴⁹? For example here, you have a bright area that gives a double effect. It is at once like a sunbeam coming through, and everything is dust, confused, and you can not. . . When you look at this picture at different times of day, you have different impressions. It is curious. Even now, I know this picture by heart . . .well!. For example, here I see at this moment violets that I do not otherwise discern. And it is strange that it is the same for everyone: the feeling of being able to read the painting continuously and to find changes in it.

G.V.: *And this painting. . . .*

C.D.: It does not look like it, but it is Oedipus gone blind. He receives a visit from Antigone . . .la, here is her eye, her nose. You see Oedipus . . .leaning. She comes looking for him. You do not see it like this because I am explaining it to you.

G.V.: *No...I do not see...indeed.*

C.D.: Come see here, with less light: here is the head of Oedipus, and the head of Antigone.

G.V.: *Ah ! yes . . .*

C.D.: For me, it is the painting, completed, irrefutable, that I try to locate. Not dramatically in evocations of the idea . . .ideas not totally thought out, but . . .

G.V.: *It seems then that you title your paintings 'a posteriori'. You recognize certain characters in your paintings.*

C.D.: Yes, but I have thought them out, none the less. My paintings come back to me, and it is my right afterwards to baptize them and remake them into a story. . .The head of Antigone, you see it very clearly there. You

⁴⁹ *Richly covered with, or producing oil.*

understand I cannot separate myself from a landscape like that, fragmentary and pierced. Antiquity is that: it appears to us in ruins. All you can do is photographic and ideological montages. But it is in ruins. You have to put it back on its feet with work, with approaches, reparation (a collection of approaches). It is always in fragmentary antiquity that you put the pieces of a vase back in place and you discover beautiful scenes. You remember Greek vases, they are in pieces. An archeologist was aware of their value when they were in pieces and put them back together.

Here is **L'Ange blessé**⁵⁰ . It represents the France of 1940 which was mortally wounded and on the mill stone (mill of straw). All of a sudden people come to see what is falling on the mill of straw and they do not notice the size of the disaster. The other angel comes back down from the sky to deliver his brother.

This one is **la chute d'Icare**⁵¹ Icarus leaves with his wings and flies away. The picture is reversible, Icarus falls to the sea, without his wings. Here is the sky on fire that boils the earth, the earth is boiling. There are rising vapors. It is the Empyree⁵², do you know what that means? It means “on fire”; (pyr) in Greek means “fire”. The Empyree is what the Greeks called this blinding terrifying, solar light. They believed that the sky could never be extinguished. That is why, in the physics of Heraclite, the atmosphere was rediscovered in grand basins (of a fountain) called *auges* (drinking troughs) that prevented the burning rays of the sun from burning the earth.

G.V.: Does your painting represent these grand auges?

C.D.: Yes, precisely: these zones of catastrophe are civilized in wax, so to speak, the wax makes beautiful curves, types of resurgence or calm

⁵⁰ *The Wounded Angel*”

⁵¹ *“The Fall of Icarus”*

⁵² *In ancient cosmology, the highest part of the sky where the gods lived. The infinite space containing the stars, a celestial vault visible from any point on earth, limited by the horizon.*

“albente coelom,”⁵³ a very beautiful Latin expression: the breaking of dawn, as if the bands were unfolding and becoming white . . . that is the “le Bouquet” . . . the bouquet of sky, the bouquets of clouds! It has always inspired me. Around Easter time, the sky becomes very beautiful in Marnay. It becomes like a bouquet; the bouquet is scattered . . . and then it turns gracious. All these mists come together and shape a delight that evaporates singing. It is the new year, it is Easter, it is the resurrection, it is the rediscovery and the arrival again of new joys, a sentiment of *nouveauté*, maybe of lyricism too. In any case, I try to paint with lyricism if possible. It is a call from the depths. People believe that the inside of things (objects) is inert. But I think differently. For example, a conch (shell) - where we hear the sound of the sea - is revealing internal things, things which despite everything retain a kind of truth, never revealed, never known. Eh! Well, for me there are places, not Marnay, but where there is a height, a kind of abyss, a hole of where things have happened and which, for an attentive ear, for an imaginative mind began to stir again. You see this thing -le “Pentacle” of Baskine⁵⁴ -it is also indicates this. It is chance that makes it vibrate, and then God, the divine side of things and the random side of things. As if there was suddenly a meeting, and a coming together! . . . I just seize it precisely, whereas the seers guess it. Now they are circumstantial wizards, who are there, who say. “We are going to prophesize . . .” types like Lanza del Vasto.⁵⁵ These are people who bring a kind of revival of these things. Baskine was like that. Of course it is pretty easy to say, in this place here, there was certainly something that happened: a soul or a body that extends arms towards us. Should we remove them from the depths of oblivion? This is the resurrection of things . . . That is why I get on well with people. It is not a question of the predictions they make, but the resumption of power from the past. We

⁵³ Latin = “the sky opens”

⁵⁴ Maurice Baskine (1901-1968) member of the Resistance, joined the Surrealists in 1946, broke with the Surrealists in 1951, pursued alchemical studies, large collection of his works at Cordes-sur-Ceil, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.

⁵⁵ Lanza del Vasto (1901 -1981) a philosopher, poet, artist, Catholic and non-violent activist. A western disciple of Ghandi who worked for inter-religious dialogue, spiritual renewal, ecological activism and nonviolence.

make an attempt anyway. . . You know when you rub something with a cat's skin, we give it strength again, all of a sudden it becomes like a magnet . . . the attraction is none the less, something that is obscure, which is hidden and if one had not rediscovered it like this, eh! well, it would be inert. Getting back to my wax. The wax can do this with an inert thing, like a piece of wood that I coated with wax: suddenly something appears. And you know the insect that produces the wax, it is as if it is aware of giving the earthlings a kind of analytic power. You analyze what will happen when you see a painting with wax. All of a sudden you rediscover yourself from a confused reality; all of a sudden you see things very crisp . . . It is very important; it is the goal any artist must have, to take nothing and do something with it.

G.V.: *The nothing is wax?*

C.D.: The nothing is reality, and the wax makes the transfer. But you, you have enough inventive spirit to be able to establish a poetic link with that, or simply the right visual link. Eh! Well, it is already something. I do not think my painting is unfriendly. Because there is unfriendly painting and repulsive painting made to annoy people.

G.V.: *But that is not your goal?*

C.D.: I am concerned enough by now that I want my painting to say that the quality of my paintings is what activates *a joie de vivre* for others. It is because my bright colors have joy of life. . . that I can, perhaps, communicate to others.

G.V.: *You once told me that you had periods of clear paintings and periods of dark paintings. What does it correspond to?*

C.D.: It corresponds to research, really. You understand, the dark painting . . . It must be distinguished: The dark must not be opaque. The dark must come to transparency . . . darks but especially transparencies. And then, we need to make new types of adaptations. Our temperament changes with age - for example there is maturity, there is youth, there is

the tender age, there is ripe age, the senile age also and they are somehow linked together - you still have to co-ordinate early painting with senile painting. It is like the coordination of stars or planets . . . All this ends up being done. This is why, for example, there is family. To recognize each other . . . “ It is raining raw truths, let’s open our red umbrellas.”

G.V.: Did you start by sketching?

C.D.: A drawing and calculus, referring me to Plato . . . at 63.5 degrees, the stroke of an isocèle triangle for this ration of 20, “Icosaedric”, from the Greek icos, twenty. The icosahedron has this feature of being able to build from the isosceles triangle.

G.V.: It is very mathematic!

C.D.: Yes, but a mathematics that wants to be practical, symbolic and poetic: a poetic mathematics can also exist. Practical mathematics is still in a numerology. While it is not built. It is always in accounts that are intended to be results, results of experience that have been numbered and that return to the existence of humanity always about the same. While geometry rises in the space of ideas.

G.V.: And the meaning of . . .

C.D.: Eh! Well, it is water. It is the symbol of water, icosàèdre. Water, I think is the raw material of the earth. Without water, I can not paint with wax. So, for me , it is my torch. This is ultimately the only thing that keeps me to this ancient philosophy and science. For ancient science was a science. It did not progress because it was done by philosophers. Be careful, do not let us digest the numerological science, it can result in a kind of bombastic impulse, limitless, and then it breaks any restraint, any reasoning that is worthy of human dignity, which is precisely a restraint, an asceticism. So, you have to know how to limit yourself, to restrict yourself. And the religious ascetic was a continuation of the ancient philosophical ascetic.

G.V.: Let's go back to the painting, **Desnos and Youki**.

C.D.: It is Youki Foujita. She is Foujita's wife, whose name was Fusti. Foujita could not pronounce her name and called her You. Youki Desnos, afterwards. She became the great lady of surrealism. That is to say, all the brilliant minds were guests at her home on the rue Mazarine until the war. I worked a little as a carpenter there when Desnos moved in. He was poor. He was a journalist on the radio with Paul Deharme.⁵⁶ and made comments about the advertising. It was amusing because it was completely disjointed and Desnos arranged it poetically. It was around this painting (**Desnos and Youki**) that Derain⁵⁷, Dos Passos,⁵⁸ Hemingway⁵⁹ came and spoke. During the course of the fever of the Spanish Revolution they gathered at the home of Desnos. All the great intellectuals had participated in the Spanish war, it was thought that there was going to be a terrible *Jarnac blow*⁶⁰ they returned completely demoralized and broken. It was then that there was in France what is called the Popular Front.

G.V.: Were you in Marnay at this time, or were you in Paris?

C.D.: I was in Marnay. But I had known Desnos for a very long time, since 1922. Desnos called me from time to time and I came to Paris to work on his house for him. He did not have a penny: he lived in a big house on rue Mazarine and had to furnish it. I built him a special cabinet

⁵⁶ Paul Deharme (1898-1934) pioneer of French radio. Married to the poet and novelist Lisa Deharme who was considered one of the muses of Surrealism.

⁵⁷ Andre Derain (1880-1954) French artist, painter, sculptor and co-founder of Fauvism with Henri Matisse.

⁵⁸ John Dos Passos (1896-1970) American writer of Portuguese descent, graduate of Harvard. One of the major novelists of the post WW I 'lost generation'. Met Hemingway while ambulance drivers in WW I.

⁵⁹ Ernest Hemingway (1899 - 1961) American novelist, journalist. Started out as foreign correspondent for the Toronto Star in Paris in 1921. Present at invasion of Normandy and liberation of Paris in WW II. The Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

⁶⁰ Jarnac Blow is a fencing term that came out of one of the best known duels of the Renaissance(1547). It refers to a crippling blow to the back of the opponent's exposed knee or calf, but came to mean any tricky mode of attack.

for his poetry. I made a staircase, a kind of loft, it had a little corner for him, because Youki drank a lot. I do not know if she was taking drugs (I never knew). But in any case she lived a charmed life, with Aragon,⁶¹ with Breton, with all the surrealists that frequented Desnos's home.

G.V.: Were you part of the surrealist movement at that time?

C.D.: Ah! yes, I was part of the surrealist movement at that time. It was the right time. I was involved in a sort of revival of surrealism when Desnos and Prevert⁶² and others came up against Breton. There was a pamphlet called "*Un cadavre*"⁶³ written by Breton against Anatole France⁶⁴. (In response to this)⁶⁵ Breton was criticized by his own friends.⁶⁶ Naturally there has been total exclusion by surrealism. Everyone said to each other: I'm the boss. But no, Breton said: It is me. . . .

G.V.: Breton was very tyrannical?

C.D.: Ah! yes, tyrannizing anyway. Saying, "Well, we are going to vote, what are you saying about this individual who missed my meeting the other day?" - "(Piece of) GARBAGE, excluded" said the whole band of young guys happy to rank in the surrealism movement.

G.V.: Breton did not like music?

⁶¹ Louis Aragon (1897-1982) French poet, novelist. Political activist and spokesperson for communism. Broke with the Surrealists over his commitment to communism.

⁶² Jacques Prevert (1900 - 1977) A French poet and screenwriter.

⁶³ *Un Cadavre* was the name of two separate pamphlets published in France in October 1924 & January 1930. The first pamphlet written by Andre Breton and Louis Aragon appeared in response to the national funeral Anatole France. Breton referred to Anatole France as "gilded mediocrity."

⁶⁴ Anatole France, French poet, best selling author, 1921 Nobel Laureate.

⁶⁵ I think Domec is now referring to the second pamphlet, also entitled "*Un cadavre*" published in 1930 by a number of disaffected surrealists, sharply criticizing Andre Breton.

⁶⁶ See, Rosemont, Penelope. Editor. 1998. Austin. University of Texas Press. *Surrealist Women, An International Anthology*. p.10, f.n. 14.

C.D.: No, he hated it. Fatally, he took a dislike of anything that was the transcription of a “*poetique musicalité*”, so to speak. He absolutely wanted nothing to do with a philosophical movement, only a didactic movement. The surrealist group was taught; to maintain itself in a line of philosophic voluntary sterility: not to have the kind of *grandiloquence*⁶⁷ that all poems more or less cultivate. On the contrary asceticism was cultivated. Significance was to be cultivated within a few words.

G.V.: How do you fit into this surrealist movement?

C.D.: I was involved because I had no preconceived idea of “*l’artisterie*”. I said to myself: I still have a kind of freedom in me, I do not go to exhibitions, I do not have a dealer (selling my paintings), I am thus complemented freely without the foremost need painters lust after. The Picasso affair dates from that time. Suddenly, the surrealists said:, There is only one painter who is good, it is Picasso”. Picasso was the conductor and the hero of the surrealists. Really. Max Ernst came along after. Dali too. Masson⁶⁸. They arrived long after Picasso was influenced by the ideas of Breton, an ardent proselyte of the surrealist movement which represented neither the Academy, nor a school, nor anything at all and was somewhat destructive of new ideas. For example, we did not want to hear about Cubism. One returned to a kind of caricatural mannerism with a total indifference for the idea(s). There was this admirable statement: “Surrealism pretends to understand nothing about anything.”

G.V.: And this notion of automatism found in all surrealist texts, how did you understand it, and did you express it in your painting?

⁶⁷ *Grand loquaciousness.*

⁶⁸ *Andre Masson (1896-1987) French artist associated with Surrealism/automatic drawing. Severely wounded in WW I in exile in the U.S. from 1941 -1945 strong influence on the Abstract Expressionist movement, returned to France. Brother-in-Law of Jacques Lacan.*

C.D.: Eh! well, in my painting it expressed itself by negating the form a priori. It was necessary that from the stain of painting an image appeared in a kind of chiaroscuro⁶⁹ that would happen only by working the surface slowly. The stain would work as a kind of foil and suddenly one could see, on the spot either an image of monsters or a realistic image emerge. For example, walls. At one moment it made a section of nearly ruined walls behind which hid the monsters.

G.V.: Was there a kind of romanticism in all of this?

C.D.: Yes, but the essence of romanticism;⁷⁰ there were no more heroes in this romanticism. Whereas in the the romanticism of the past, the hero was the touchstone.

G.V.: So, were these kinds of incomprehensible images coming out of the unconscious - or consciousness?

C.D.: Yes, but that could be understood by remembering the old painters as for example, Jerome Bosch.⁷¹ Jerome Bosch returned, in his ghostly spirit, refurbishing, if one can say, surrealism, the surrealist imagery. Hybrids that made the fortunes of Max Ernst.⁷²

G.V.: Did your mythological figures share the same set of ideas? Is there a kind of reminiscence of a collective consciousness through your mythological figures?

⁶⁹ An artistic technique developed during the Renaissance using strong tonal contrasts between light and dark to model 3-D forms.

⁷⁰ Romanticism was an artistic, literary musical cultural and intellectual movement originating in Europe toward the end of the 18th century. 1800-1850. Emphasis on individualism and emotion, preferring the medieval to the classical, in part a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, Enlightenment, and the scientific rationalization of nature - all components of Modernity.

⁷¹ Jhieronymus Bosch (1450-1516).

⁷² Max Ernst (1891-1976). German painter, sculptor, graphic artist, poet. Primary pioneer of Dada an Surrealism. Spouse of Dorteia Tanning from 1946-1976.

C.D.: No, because I followed Desnos's⁷³ advice. Desnos said to me, "If you are doing surrealist painting, you are done for, you will be hooked up with art dealers who will make you do genre painting, and as I know you, you are good. If you are weak enough, you will let yourself be rotten like that. (referring to the Surrealist group of that time). You must not. You must be yourself. You must go back to Marnay, build your foundations, your supports, your culture . . . boats . . .but do not fall under the influence of the jerks of Saint-Germain-des-Pres.⁷⁴ You have work. Do not depend on them. Live off your parents, which is not a bad thing. Unlike us, where there is no family support and you are on your own. But you, if you can keep this free and comfortable life, do it." This worked for me. People had trust in me because I was seen as responsible and present. Consequently American painters said: "Claude is well thought of, we can bring him to America." And by chance I left in 1939 for America: two months later, the war broke out.

G.V.: In 1939, many surrealist painters were in America. This is the case of Masson⁷⁵, Breton . . .

C.D.: No, he escaped in 1941. He was forced to get out. He was near Grasse or Cavalaire. . .He remained hidden there, they were rounding up the intellectuals, so he escaped. Max Ernst was gone to.

G.V.: It has been said that the surrealists were not concerned with the war. That is the reason they were in the United States. They fled the war, they wanted to ignore it. . .Did you take part in . . .

C.D.: No, on the contrary, we were quite conflicted. Men like Desnos and Aragon⁷⁶ have shown they were also ardent patriots. For them it was

⁷³ Robert Desnos. See F.N. #5

⁷⁴ In the 6th arrondissement of Paris, known for its Jazz Clubs post WWII, famous cafes, publishing houses, the centre of the Existentialist movement and Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

⁷⁵ See F.N. #65

⁷⁶ See F.N. #58

necessary to fight Hitler with all their strength and not be indoctrinated by that.⁷⁷ It concerned some of them, a few. But in the surrealist group there were many people who were Cuban or Argentinian. They were the intellectuals in “no man’s land”. We did not have a nationality. And all of a sudden, when France was defeated, it was there that they saw that something was wanting, that the surrealist homeland was indeed the neighborhood of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, and that we must not lose it. So everyone became Gaullist or like that. Even now, a guy like Dali⁷⁸ who was a worshiper of Desnos, said, “Desnos embodies French poetry and I would like to paint as he does poetry.”

G.V.: You arrived in the United States in 1939? How long were you there?

C.D.: Until 1947. I returned to France in 1946. I did an exhibition, then I returned after that.

G.V.: The Abstract Movement, which was called gestural painting was happening in the United States; how did you welcome this painting? Pollock⁷⁹ . . .?

C.D.: It was something that claimed independence from the French movement and it was also, if you will, a dismemberment of the surrealist ideas of that time. Painters wanted to make a painting of gestures and accompany it with screams. For example, the pictorial scream was for them, a way of showing the futility of all this classical effort that was claimed rightly or wrongly, to give life to the surrealist movement. It was claimed that this return to a harmony between a true classicism⁸⁰. . . colors. . . a kind of crispness in the drawing, even a deliberate simplicity in the drawing, claimed that it was a negation of the current painting. That it

⁷⁷ Referring to the anti-semitism and the Vichy government.

⁷⁸ Salvador Dali (1904-1989) Spanish surrealist.

⁷⁹ Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) American. Major artist of the Abstract Expressionist Movement.

⁸⁰ Classicism in the arts refers to a big regard for the Classical period in Western tradition (Renaissance to 18th century) as setting the standard for form, harmony in the arts.

would be necessary to absolutely remake an anarchic painting, chaotic and raw, but without the idea of the classical construction of the Renaissance that the surrealists at the time began to adopt again.

G.V.: What did you do in the United States during those eight years?

C.D.: I painted. I worked at the Metropolitan Museum for five years restoring works of art there. While there, I perfected painting with wax. There was a very good laboratory, with all the materials one could desire which were used for all the ancient and modern paintings. There were the waxes, the oils, the pigments, the dyestuffs, an admirable library all developed for this type of research.

G.V. Is it from this period that you elaborated on technique of paintings with wax?

C.D.: No, I had done them before, but in a rather confused way. That is, I thought paper and wax would work together. But it was necessary to have a certain paper, the imperial Japan paper, very solid, the wax adheres to this paper (without sliding off). The paper drinks a part of the color, especially if it is a coloring matter, because we do not do any more with pigments...⁸¹

G.V.: What is the difference?

C.D.: The pigment is mineral or vegetable, a kind of powder derived from a metal or metal oxide; the coloring is derived from nitrogen, that is to say, nitric acid on anything that is an albuminoid material⁸² which makes the colors of the prism. These colors are collected: Prussian blue, methylene red, all the violets that are so bright, that burst and suddenly turn into tar or dust in a very short time...

⁸¹ *The pigments are the finely ground powders that must be mixed with linseed oil and other substances.*

⁸² *Albuminoid: any class of simple proteins as a keratin, gelatin, or collagen that are insoluble in all neutral solvents. aka scleroprotein.*

The Metropolitan Museum had put a laboratory at my disposal where I did all the significant experiments I wanted. At the same time, I repaired the Greek vases, the Greek sculptures, and the Greek marbles. In short, I was making replicas.

G.V.: Were you in the habit of doing restoration?

C.D.: Yes, I did some restoration. I had technician training. I could restore in wood, make old varnish, redo waxes and colorations of wood. That is very important when you do any restoration because the stone is like wood, like pottery too. It is a porous matter, you can restore it by layers of glue. So once you know the trick to repair, to make false wood, for example to fill a scratch in a table, the only thing to do is go forward.

At the time, there was no school at all for that. I did a very serious apprenticeship in repairing antique furniture, making antique furniture, carpentry, at the old *menuisiers*⁸³ of the time who had a great deal of knowledge: amalgams of colors; how to superimpose colors on each other to make a beautiful black. It was a technical job that I had learned and that I could use well for any repair - except for *faïence*⁸⁴ - but when it came to the land, wood, iron, bronze, I knew what I was doing. . .

G.V.: Is that when you started making frames?

C.D.: No, I was already making frames?

G.V.: Have you always made your frames yourself?

C.D.: Yes, I started when I was 22. I made my frames. I was a craftsman with a kind of freedom. For example, I could make furniture - my mother's chair - and I liked it. I worked by hand. I did not need a machine. I had a set of tools that worked very well. And I had Marnay: I had my other tools and started to repair old furniture. Because of my reputation, I

⁸³ *woodworker*

⁸⁴ *earthenware*

was immediately hired by the Metropolitan Museum. My brother-in-law⁸⁵ was a friend of the director. My brother-in-law and I created a large fresco in Worcester, Massachusetts for an auditorium where a large orchestra played. We had decorated the *Salle des pas perdus*⁸⁶ in the auditorium. Since it was the American veterans - the American Legion - who owned this auditorium, they wanted a war scenario and at the same time images of the main donors. Behind a landscape of Worcester, we painted all the people who had participated; ladies, damsels, orphans. . . It was one piece that was 15 meters long and 8 meters high.⁸⁷

G.V.: Was it a collective work?

C.D.: No, it was my my brother-in-law's work. We had the drawings. I made the tapestry cartoon. It was fine for this kind of work. We did a *decalque*⁸⁸ of the drawing. A large canvas for this piece had been made in England - fifteen meters long (49 feet), a single piece of canvas. That is what is interesting in my life; I can do large work. After, I made a mosaic mural. It took a crate of mosaic. I then cut the tiles and did ceramist work.

G.V.: You know a lot of techniques. You make your frames, you make your colors yourself, you do everything from start to finish?

C.D.: And now, I really have no way that is modern. I do everything prehistorically. For me, the wax is a prehistoric medium and I try to regain this spirit. The spirit of smear, the spirit of clarity and symbol. You understand, prehistoric people were doing frescoes to find an animal spirit. Wonderful animals were made. They thought that the better it was done, the more captive the animal would be, or the better the sacrifice and that is what the archeologists omit in their ramblings. For example the Lascaux

⁸⁵ Leon Kroll, well known artist in the U.S.A.

⁸⁶ Great hall.

⁸⁷ 49 feet long and 26 feet high.

⁸⁸ Transfer a drawing, counter tracing.

Caves. They did not see this, it was the perfection of prehistoric people,⁸⁹ which required precision, this minutia and indestructibility of the matter, because the matter of wax is indestructible.

G.V.: How do you work your wax?

C.D.: Ah, hah! you want my secrets, dear friend! You want to get it out of me. You are going to make me bring to the table with precise engagement, what I consider most precious in my life, even though I have kept this from all the schools, all people and parties. I never did a conference on this, never, ever. One day, Christian Daninos⁹⁰ came and said: “Claude, please tell me how you do wax painting?”. I said to him: “Well, you go to a hive, and you sit near the hive, you see the bees enter the hive.” Daninos said: “But after?” Then I said to him: “After that, you wait a month, two months, and at the harvest of the honey, you rush to the beekeeper and say to him: Sir, could I have some of your rays of honey?” So, you take a piece of honey filled ray, put it in your mouth, it goes out everywhere, you quickly assimilate the sugar mixture, but the wax remains between your teeth. Then you chew it, you know that is almost white, your saliva made it a kind of wax medium, without honey, and you mix it with water and it is magical. So wax paint is born. I cannot go to the beekeeper, I buy my wax at the bee merchant’s.⁹¹ I buy a very small quantity, and with tap water, I increase it. . . I increase its capacity, its quantity, and its volume. I paint like this, applying this small amount of wax mixed with water - it is indestructible.

⁸⁹ A note on how I translated this passage. The word ‘caveman’ and ‘prehistoric man’ was used throughout this paragraph. I purposely chose gender neutral terms. Recent research, primarily Dean R. Snow’s paper of 2013; see *American Antiquity* 78(4), 2013, pp.746-761 shows that cave painting was done primarily by women. See also: <https://phys.org> & artchester.net May 7 2015.

⁹⁰ Christian Daninos (1944-1992) French actor and production designer. Known for the ‘Buble Chair’.

⁹¹ Thank-you to Emmanuelle Pourroy for clarification on the type of bee’s wax Domec is talking about. This is pure bee’s wax, left from pressing honey out of the comb. This is not the prepared bee’s wax medium you purchase in art supply stores today. Though in my personal studio practice, Williamsburg Wax Medium is very close.

G.V.: And you mix the wax with pigments?

C.D.: Yes, with pigments. Pigments that are the most natural, which are red ocher, that is to say the land of Marnay, clay, coal - charcoal - the things that are most at hand, which does not mean the most banal. But something that someone knowledgeable about can find in a cliff, the cliffs of the banks of the Seine, the banks of rivers. There is a soil of alluvium⁹² which the riverbed is recreating. It is these alluvial deposits which contain all that the painting desires. Naturally it is in a raw state, it is necessary to refine, to sort, to grind and give these materials their rudimentary form, again to refine them.

For me Marnay is an amazing source of raw materials. . .For example, I find my greens, my gray, my red, my brown. And that is enough. . .

C.D.: When I brought this picture to Desnos, the painter Andre Derain⁹³ was there. Then Youki, all glorious, says, “You see my portrait, look at me, it is a young painter, it is radical.” I was there next to her. She says (to Derain): “What do you think?” He said: “The painting does not resemble you, it is not your face, but what I can say is, that this is a painter.” So she said to me, “Claude, did you hear what, Derain, the great Andre Derain, said about you?” And he (Derain): “This, this is painting . . .what are you doing?” So I said, “I am rustic.” Then he said, “That is good, keep going, come see me if you need.” So, of course I never went to see him.

G.V.: You painted this painting in Marnay?

⁹² A deposit of clay, silt, sand and gravel left by flowing streams in a river valley or delta, typically producing fertile soil.

⁹³ See F.N. #54

C.D.: Yes.

G.V.: It is one of your first paintings?

C.D.: Yes.

G.V.: How old were you?

C.D.: This is the era of **Deux Chiens**. It is an oil painting.

G.V.: So, did you start painting in oil?

C.D.: Yes, I started painting with oil. But then, I was aware of this interpretation from the surrealists who wanted to paint with any medium - anything that is anything is a good painting, but all that reflects the academy, the school, the crafts. . . it is worth nothing at all!

G.V.: You painted with other materials, I mean, did you incorporate sand?. . wood, in your paintings?

C.D.: Yes, in this one, there is sawdust.

G.V.: You gave up the process afterwards?

C.D.: Yes, because sawdust gave a stiffness to the canvas but created *embus*⁹⁴ and the embus are very difficult to correct with paint in large painting. So I completely gave up and started to paint on wooden panels that I prepared, glued and planed which gave me satisfaction and which did not break.

G.V.: Is this painting from you?

⁹⁴ Soaked in paint, dried in paint in which the colors are dried in creating dullness, flatness of paintings.

C.D.: No, it is from Baskine⁹⁵. It is an esoteric machine. This is **Le Pentacle**, a kind of pendulum that can move in the course of centuries in a way we can barely sense, but if we analyzed it, this dial would give direction and someone versed in esotericism could say what this part of the earth is doing.

G.V.: *Are you, yourself versed in esotericism?*

C.D.: Yes, I have read esoteric books, but I can not think that that we can base a science simply on a graphic representation, if it is not deeply felt. Generally, those who make these kinds of . . . apart from Baskine, who has interpreted the five senses and the pentacle - do things that go further than painting. It is at the same time a symbol, *une oeuvre plastique*⁹⁶ and a secret - esoteric, it can be said that there is a secret - not to be revealed to everyone.

G.V.: *Is there an initiation?*

C.D.: Yes, there is an initiation. Baskine died about five years ago (1968). We can say that he had a language that was clear enough and that we did not understand anything because he stammered a lot. He had ready phrases that did not fit his thoughts . . .It is funny . . .in his numerologies, for example, he said, “ Sure, I can predict the future” . . .things that are often quite disturbing and often quite limited . . .He said, “ It takes a little effort to enlighten me more.” And we never made this effort. We can not force ourselves to go through . . . The five senses, for example, we can not know where the sight is, where hearing is, or where is touch. . .He said: “On a day you are not feeling well, with your eyes closed, you suddenly feel a kind of force of nature. . .” Finally, it was at the same time magic, magnetism and all things like numerology, because it was on accidental numbers that he made his predictions. He made predictions from his

⁹⁵ *Maurice Baskine (1901-1968) see F.N.# 51*

⁹⁶ ‘An action of molding.’ From the mid-17th century French *plastique* in the sense “characteristic of molding” - material easily shaped. *Oeuvre* = work, labor. action, performance, production...

pictures. He was in a creative phrase . . .and then immediately he determined that if it had been created, it was for an obscure purpose that he was going to clear up. And it was a very good departure for any works. Very often his works missed the mark. But he was able to resolve them quite well and when we saw his works, we would say to ourselves, “ Hey, what made him do this?” And he said, “This is in the moment. In the moment I am doing this. I do not have a guide. I have nothing, I do not have a policy, I do not even have a plan.”

So, he had his small surrealist chapter. . . It is not like the surrealists, who are motivated by Breton who comes to berate them; then they are obliged to do counter espionage, or emphasize what Mr. Breton said. So of course it was neither artists nor philosophers and especially not the wise ones.

G.V.: Did you agree with what Baskine said?

C.D.: Yes. The departure of his paintings and ideas were in my direction. He said: “I work with what I choose.” And that was good. This was the reflection of our fraternal union. We said, “We are going to think, we do not need a guide . . .Here is a black, what is going to become of this black?” And all of a sudden shapes appear on my panel, . . . here it is. He did not choose this, he was constructing from what was hidden, from the lines of energy - the sieve of the senses, of what comes from the senses . . . From the unclassifiable of the universe passing in these small rays, bending in a display that is called consciousness and there it is. The consciousness recreates the images after because with this type of assistance, this sort of fuzzy judgement . . .will remake them to the extent of your will, your intelligence, your desires, your love.

We really looked at Baskine as a fabulous guy. And he did not desist. It was like, that is fine. He did not persuade anyone, but he always continued. It was like. . .you know in antiquity, there were people like Tiresias⁹⁷ who were neither gods nor diviners, but who carried the strong convictions of

⁹⁷ *Clairvoyant, blind prophet in Greek Mythology. See F.N. #16*

Homer for example. Tiresias was certainly a contemporary of Homer, he was some type of wizard and supposedly connected with hell. He could make apparitions appear or simply evoke the souls of the dead.

G.V.: Do you read Greek and Latin fluently?

C.D.: Yes, for a long time.

G.V.: Do you consider this an initiation to something?

C.D.: Yes, because it is a kind of safeguard, of fortification that does not leave you. And that is good. If you do not have a critical mind, it can be used in a precise way, because the mode of expression of Homer⁹⁸ and Heraclitus⁹⁹ is something terribly deep and effective.

G.V.: Do you consider what you are doing a mythological painting, in the spirit of Homer and Heraclitus?

C.D.: At the same time mythologic-philosophical, which is very gratifying. Perhaps it does not have a great audience, but it is very gratifying. If you look at my paintings, and look at them in detail, you will see that there are things that appear in the distance, in depth, that are quite available. The more you go. . .I do want to say. . . the more you treat these paintings with respect, the more you interact. . .the more things will appear. Because there are things beyond measure. I have been working on this painting for over a year: to amass on it a sort of a *resilles*¹⁰⁰ which at the same time are invisible, but which, if they are discovered, are met, reveal themselves. . .

G.V.: And they reveal themselves through the multiple layers of wax?

⁹⁸ Homer. (c.750 BCE) author of the Iliad and the Odyssey, central works of Greek literature. "Be still my heart, thou hast known worst than this."

⁹⁹Heraclitus (c.535 BCE - c. 475 BCE) a pre-Socratic philosopher who insisted that change was fundamental to the essence of the universe.

¹⁰⁰ Resilles = a hairnet, or the bars over a window. Also a type of toile, gauze like fabric.

C.D.: Yes, because nothing becomes obliterated; they are all alive, real, present and with a certain allure of something (do not print this in your interview because they will say: “Here, she is a maniac ~ still crazy~we will put her in a padded room.”

G.V.: Are there themes that you have followed for a long time, which at various periods of your life, have resurfaced?

C.D.: Yes, for example, the river. For me the river is a contained space, a moving space of my life that is at the same time a fear. The river is also the cataclysm, the accident, the obstacle. Flooding is one thing that makes you standstill on a kind of island and you are there, contemplating this extraordinary force that is a river in overflow and this nature needs to be revealed to those who no longer know it. No one knows the floods, whereas in Marnay, every year, the Seine comes back. She is at the same time grandiose, magnificent, mysterious. We live on it. She offers you the desire to go far, at little cost, in a trip you make by rowing. Where otherwise, you have to get a subway ticket . . .to go far . . .La, the river attracts you, takes you, says to you: “Get in your raft and come with me, I will show you some awesome things. And of course, you are shown some awesome things. At night, it is even more wonderful.

G.V.: You walk at night, during the floods. What do you think you discover?

C.D.: I do not know. Haunted landscapes. Frightening? You arrive in the woods, those huge trees around you, that hug you. You feel the presence of nature in a night of cataclysm. The rustle of water against a trunk is something amazing. I finally had a chance to discover this because of my childhood solitude. I realized I could maneuver the boat and away I went. At my advanced age it has the same splendor, grandeur and wonder.

G.V.: And you flew kites?

C.D.: Yes, we flew kites.

G.V.: You have taken up this theme of the kite, or the fall of the angel, or authority falling in a fairly continuous way. We find it in several paintings.

C.D.: Yes, because I do not get tired of thinking about the effect of floating through the sky, something that is not motorized. The kite is testing the resistance of the air with a string, and I admire a man like Franklin, who defies the storm with kites. How did he not get electrocuted? It always amazes me. He was in the middle of a storm, flying kites. There were terrible electrical discharges, but he was never electrocuted. It surprises me a lot. I never dared to do that. But in the wind in September, October, the kite for us, it felt like something of the bird. The bird, I think, when in its cage has a kind of modulation . . .As when you play the piano, *forte, pianissimo, decrescendo, crescendo*...

G.V.: Do you play a lot of music?

C.D.: Yes, always badly.

G.V.: It depends on the pianos. Have you always done it?

C.D.: Yes, always: I never give up the piano. Because it seems to me that I find myself returning.

*****At this point the interview session ends. It resumes with the interviewer Guy Beaumont*****

This part of the interview begins with a discussion that has already started about a painting of Domec's.

C.D.: One and only, “uva” (una); and “kepac” (keiras), it means horn. And this is the symbol of purity, love and unselfishness, I believe.

G.B.: And why did she fall?

C.D.: Don't you see, there are sons of the virgin all around? So that is it; there is a kind of *calembour -de reste*¹⁰¹. All of life is made up of witticisms and misinterpretations. We must not let this pass. These things must be clarified, each in its own way. I clarify them by painting. All the ideas that have been based in wit, misinterpretation and have been thought of none the less with the same criteria as the serious ones, how do we handle them? They all exist. You may scour them out of your mind, they exist, they return.

G.B.: When you decide to paint a painting on wood, do you take any piece of wood? Is it the shape of the wood that is at hand that gives you the idea to do something, or do you already have an idea and it is the harmony between the idea and the piece of wood?

C.D.: Yes, that is exactly it. Once an idea-form has taken place in my brain, I say to myself: How can I do it, how can I succeed in taming this idea, in making it mine? It is necessary that you arrange them, put them in a certain order which are the painted ideas. Idea, it is this: it means that you put visual representation in word or picture; and then let them ramble in your brain in the form of ideas that repeat, but generally form an image, if you think about it. An idea, even if you wrap it up with words, it is an image, and you always come back to say: but this idea, before I abandon it forever, perhaps I must realize it. So change your scenery, you visit your neighbor . . . Anyone, or whatever, and then these ideas settle down, diminish in intensity and become *le neant de ta vie*.¹⁰² ?

¹⁰¹ A pun based on remnants, leftovers, remainders of the lightness of sound.

¹⁰² . . . *le neant de ta vie* = the emptiness of your life. A 20th century phrase. Influence by Sartre who was influenced by Heidegger. The influences of WWII, the Holocaust.

G.B.: At the beginning, before you painted on wood, did you paint on canvas? Did you prepare the canvas yourself?

C.D. Well, that is to say, here and there. I purchased the canvas, I prepared it with casein¹⁰³, then I stretched it. It was generally quite suitable as a method. I did not have too many problems with it.

G.B.: But it seems that it is more satisfying to you to make a painting starting from a piece of wood that suits you. To shape it, to make the frame, to mix the paint, to do everything?

C.D.: Because I was still trained in a carpentry discipline. Carpentry is small architecture. And this small architecture, takes a form much more accentuated than the real architecture on paper. True architecture on paper is a lined piece of colored paper with right angled squares. (I am assuming this is graph paper). Where as when you have mapped it, you have done something in space which has volume, weight and form. All this fixes your idea, especially since it is the completion that must lead to an aesthetic idea much clearer than the idea of mass and form. Whereas when you work with wood, you do something with space which has volume and shape and all of this fixes your idea especially that it is completion of a work which must lead to an aesthetic idea which is much clearer than the idea of mass and shape.

G.B.: Do these woodworking techniques help in painting?

C.D.: Enormously. Because it made me put together my painting. My painting is put together with shapes and geometrical forms first.

G.B.: According to your shapes then?

¹⁰³ Casein is derived from milk protein, is fast drying, and water soluble medium used by artists. It has a glue-like consistency but can be thinned to any degree with water. The dried paint film is inflexible and brittle. Has been used since Egyptian times, still used today. It dries to even consistency, ideal for murals. It can visually resemble oil painting more than other water based paints and works well as an underpainting.

C.D.: Maybe not according to the shapes, because in a square shape you can do a circle; but it has limited space, and in this space that I know is solid, I can bring together ideas, which up to now were rather scattered and the subject builds on itself. First I create the the frame that I will cover (the stretcher bars), the weight, the volume and the surface are totally different. When you have done woodworking you never forget these things. When I make a stretcher, I make an *emboisement* or *entoilement*.¹⁰⁴ (This sounds like the canvas is cradled along with being stretched). After I finish the painting, I make the frame. . . You understand, for me this is the process of painting. A painting is like a small table, this little [table - the flat surface - it is colored; it conceals or reflects a sort of image that I have always imagined and lurks in my mind. I develop it like a photographer puts a photograph on a sensitive plate. It is like the action of a camera shutter.

For example, this painting is a very small painting because the subject is very small; it is a kind of terrestrial catastrophe, the size of the ant. You see, it is an anthill in which we set foot. You see all these little holes, all that matter hanging down, hanging in the air; all the things falling apart, that will never be together again. The infinitely small, it is amazing in that it is broken forever.

G.B.: Your painting has colors, tones, some very particular things that we find practically in everything: the blues, the greens. . .

C.D.: So this is the first sketch that came out of my head . . .

G.B.: Sketch for which painting?

C.D. Here is the sketch. Here is the drawing. The sketch is great like that. The drawing is as . . .and the painting, it is close to two meters (~6.5'). Here is the finished painting. Here is the initial sketch. You see this is a lot more complex than this one and this other one. The painting is called **Saturn** the one who killed his children and devoured them. You see this

¹⁰⁴ *Entoilage* = gluing or mounting canvas, to line, cover with canvas

kind of mastication, this kind of cunning that crushes them, that eats them. Etc. . .etc. . . .

You see for me, I manage to do what I do because of my experience with tools and my experience as a woodworker. I know how to cut wood, I also know how to cut stone. Of course, I often do not have the materials because I am sort of idle in supplying myself with wood, plywood, even wooden panels. I tell myself that I will always find some. This may not be a mistake because if you have all this stuff, you start working hard . . . and it is very bad. You have to work slowly and not be pressed by the material. For example, if I had plenty of wood, plywood, I would start painting like a crazy person, which is not good at all. It takes time to think, to produce, to consider the measurements of your painting with harmony. *L'artisterie, c'est l'illustration de la depense.*¹⁰⁵

*****Ghislaine de Villeguerin, G.V. has rejoined the interview with Guy Beaumont, G.B.

G.V.: At each stage, you start drawing or sketching, then you make a small painting in another size. Do you always do it that way? What does this bring to each stage?

C.D.: At each stage, it first brings the point of view of my thoughts to completion. I did something that will last because I did this in wood and wax. So I am initially pleased on this point. Secondly, it expresses a moment in my life which was precious to me as long as I had a brush in my hand, as long as I painted. I had good eyes, I had good health. My needs were met , I was able to do this. THIS IS WHY IN THE LIFE OF A PAINTER, SILENCE AND PEACE ARE NECESSARY.¹⁰⁶ Because It is

¹⁰⁵ Literally translated: "Artistry is the illustriousness of the expenditure." The time, care, focus and presence put into an art work, shows in that art work.

¹⁰⁶ *Emphasis mine.*

very difficult to settle one's mind. You can settle it when you are young, in the middle of a fight . . .but it does not last long. This sort of fragmentation of your mind by external noise is a dreadful enemy.

G.V.: So the sketch helps you focus on your subject?

C.D.: No, it is the subject, and I can cling to it in spite of the omissions. "What is it that I dreamed one day?" . . .if I do not sketch it, it remains messed up forever. While, if I sketch the little drawing right at the moment of my waking, it is perfect. I can continue to hold on to it.

G.B.: What is important to you, with wax, is it especially its timelessness - at the level of feeling, the noble side of wax? This is not something that is greatly prized. Is that what you treasure? Or is it really the color, the particular rendering of the wax?

C.D.: Eh! well, there is also great gratification to get all these reflections of the wax, all this glow, which is discovered in the finished work. So that is why you can add different colors on the same wax, knowing that you will be able to remove them as you want, which you can not do with other color grounds.

G.V.: In the end, a painting with wax is never finished?

C.D.: It is never finished, you can always add over it.

G.B.: Ca, this is a characteristic that is unique to all paintings?

C.D.: Ah! not oil painting, because in oil painting, you cover your first brush strokes. You understand, the oil paint is opaque. So when you go beyond your first definitive brush strokes you cover everything. You have what is called "*l'empasto*" *impasto*¹⁰⁷ which is worse than lacquer. You know that on lacquer, you can only paint lacquer . . .It rids you of being able to

¹⁰⁷Paint applied so thickly that you can see the brush or palette knife strokes.

paint anything but a shiny, solid painting - and then what . . . you have a stain and solid paint stain, and then what?

While with the wax, you have a transparency from your first inspiration, at your first brush stroke, an irregularity shows because it is transparent. Color, because of gravity - do you know what gravity is - It is the weight of everything moved by the universal attraction towards the center of the earth . . . all things have it! Well, the wax has this admirable property of being able to sift certain colors in the atom of wax and leave others suspended as it dries. So you have a clear and transparent surface color, and then you have the dark foundation. That is why you have this kind of warm shimmer in the wax, a shimmer that is not brilliant: it is waxed.

G.V.: What is the difference with glazes?

C.D.: The glaze is brilliant. It is transparent, if you like, but there is no matter, it is reflective like a magnifying glass. But wax is not that. It is a shimmer, like a mother of pearl through your painting.

G.B.: When you prepare your colors - you have been doing this for a long time now, handling the wax - do you know exactly when you are preparing your painting, what the color will look like when you put it down?

C.D.: No, not exactly, roughly speaking, a kind of mixture vaguely green, vaguely blue, I do not analyze . . .

G.B.: Everything is done when you lay it down?

C.D.: Yes, everything is done at the moment when and where I lay it down with the paint brush. I can scrape it . . . and I can pile the paint to a side if I want to darken an area. This is a kind of action of gravity. Gravity is a mechanic: when an object falls on the ground, there are forces of attraction, there are forces of dispersion, there are points of impact. Well, it is the same with wax. I know that and am sensitive to that. When you first cut a piece of wood, you know in which direction you need your chips to peel so that your wood is not axed, that your wood is still usable. (You

cut with the grain, and not against it). You plane your wood in the initial direction, you follow the grain. It is sequential. It is like a piano range, you play the notes one after another. You go up, you go up, you go up . . . you make harmonies . . .it is very amazing, maybe it is even a source of madness. Because the the act of gathering ideas, painting, woodworking, gives a kind of hustle and bustle to your poor head . . .finally you say to yourself: What are you? Are you a painter or a woodworker? Are you a decorator or are you a furniture maker? It makes you travel through all that stuff. . .if you had finished them all, they might fill you with admiration. . .but as you work on them, you say to yourself: it is a work of a giant that I undertook . . .discouragement can overwhelm you . . .but the real artists do not get discouraged they continue to the completion.

G.V.: Because you do other things beside make frames?

C.D.: Yes, yes . .I am not going to do anything else. I make soup, I cook, I do housework . . .

G.V.: I mean in woodworking?

C.D.: Yes, have you seen all these machines? They all look related. Look at them. Do they look like they are from the same period of time? . . .or over time?

G.V.: No, I do not place them in the same time period.

G.B.: You still had favorite colors. Favorites is not the word, but you had dominant blue, green. . .you use a lot of blues and greens. Is it a marine influence? What part of the landscape do you live in, The Seine, water, floods?

C.D.: The water . . .inevitable. Me, I am a painter that illuminates rather than a painter who plasters. There are painters who plaster. . .for example,

people like Sonia Delaunay,¹⁰⁸ - they dazzle by juxtaposition. For me, it is enough to be able to illuminate. . . or to persuade people that it is the painting. Because it is something else. . . There is a suggestion in painting, and this suggestion is only intended to make a connection between you and the painter - because the painter paints subjects you see through the painter's eyes, and it unsettles you a lot in your previous ideas of painting. For example, when you appreciate a new painter, it unsettles your way of seeing any painting after that. Because you already have an example that has seduced you, that has elated you and you maintain this elation as a diversion to judgement.

G.V.: Which painter to you particularly like?

C.D.: In the beginning it was a painting that was quite dramatic, rather difficult to explain, not literary, but rather mysterious. Paolo Uccello¹⁰⁹ shattered me. As soon as I started painting, he is the one who captivated me. These monumental horses that are in battle where no one dies, no one shouts. . . A dark battle, a battle of forms. It is exciting to see this grayish, colorless atmosphere, this endless workmanship. The battle is completed once and for all by Paolo Uccello. The space will never change. So for me, the elements take the place of the horses and riders and types of muskets. The elements of the sky, the elements of the earth form this type of undergrowth . . .

G.B.: In the boat ride, when you go down the middle of the water, it actually gives you a kind of jubilation . . . Is that what you find, this joining of the elements?

¹⁰⁸ *Sonia Delaunay (1885-1979) Ukrainian, French, founder of the Orphism art movement noted for strong colors and geometric shapes. Known for her paintings, textile design and stage set design. the first living female artist to have a retrospective exhibition at the Louvre (1964). Named an officer of the French Legion of Honor (1975).*

¹⁰⁶ *Paolo Ucello. (1397-1475) Italian, Early Renaissance. The painting, The Battle of San Romano ~1438. The painting is the central panel of a large triptych. The painting(s) are dispersed between the Uffize, the National Gallery in London and the Louvre in Paris. It is the bold and experimental use of perspective that made Uccello famous.*

C.D.: Yes, depth . . .grass. . . roots . . .tree trunks that cross each other, that look like they are guarding, looking at the passenger you are.

G.B.: *Water is important for you. Is it because Marnay is on the Seine?*

C.D.: Yes, I have always been on the water. In my childhood I played in the boats behind my house in the winter. All my life, my feet were wet. When you have wet feet, you become like a duck, you have the feet, you could swim anywhere. . .

And it is curious that in all my landscapes, by a kind of secret instinct, I put water. I do not think a landscape is complete if there is no water. Obviously, it is a bit of an overstatement; only I believe that water without a human and a human without water. . .

G.B.: *Tell us a bit about your music. Is it just scales for your fingers, is it another source of care for you?*

C.D.: I do not compose music.. I play compositions by composers I revere. I always play classical music, between the time periods which sound good to me, the purity of the timbres during the reign of Louis XIV or Louis XV, and I imagine that in this I get to get the companionship of a wise man to take as a guide. A wise man who weighed all the problems of hearing the false note, the right note, the rhythm, the cadence from the moment he saw it. I only have to follow as skillfully as I can, in the rhythm he agreed to give to his work.

G.B.: *It gives you contentment and pleasure to play, but does it have a relationship with painting?*

C.D.: Yes, a lot, because the pattern works; the model of a strict measure that is not to exceed the subject matter. Because subject-matter, if it is not tamed immediately, inundates immediately with a flood, with excess and spoils everything. Put too much oil in a machine, it stops your mechanics. Eh! Well, for painting, it is the same thing. You do not put enough attention in the creation and are immediately cheated and overcome with

difficulty, unable to continue. Impetuosity is not recommended at all. There are people who are continually intense; they are seized with a sort of frenzy of establishing law and order around their environment, or diminishing things to a kind of meagerness, in order to dominate it.

For example, the types that make still lifes, apart from a few big ones . . . It is terrible, they shrink their visual and material field. That is to say they limit the colors, the forms, instead of celebrating them, they diminish them to do what they call accuracy, as if accuracy would give them ease. But their accuracy becomes paltry.

So that is why those who paint still-lives are always mediocre painters or painters who have a deep disinterest in their art. It does not prevent them from being able to make a living and money. So they are people who are very skilled but not interested. Skillfulness in art is not always advantageous.

G.V.: And have you always painted landscapes?

C.D.: No, I painted figures. I wish you could hear the remarks that were made by the “girls”¹¹⁰. . .oh! . . .

G.B. To return to the piano, is the piano a kind of training discipline for you. . .?

C.D.: And to become better in my (paint) mixing, my half-tints. The mixture of the notes and half-tints is the same thing. A half-tone in painting is a sequence of notes. In music, it is the same thing. If you make the first note too loud, you do not hear the note that follows. I always try to come back to this very important thing. . .and every day the music gives me an example by comparison . . .I over played this passage, it was a green that did not work, it was a black that was out of control: and it also limits me in choices when I paint something stupid, I also make stupid mistakes.

¹¹⁰ *The original French uses les “girls”. Girls in quotes.*

This gives me the voice of wisdom, a rather peremptory voice, quite rough, but I like that.

I have the impression that a painter who plays music is never disarmed. They can always start painting again, even if they miss a period. They can always start again thanks to the music which is the admirable indicator of temperance, right measurement, of exact rhythm. . .

G.V.: Do you ever paint with music?

C.D.: Ah! no it is impossible. It must be a memorized piece that stays with you when you are painting. What an odd idea. There are painters who paint with music.

G.B.: The characters who appear in your painting, the horses for example, do they correspond to a period? Or do you always want to, did you always use characters? Are you continuing to paint people now?

C.D.: Yes. There is still, if not a prophetic, a symbolic gesture in human movement. If the symbol lasts a long time, it becomes prophetic. I like the prophetic. I like to see people stand up and say words with a little madness in their eyes.

I find humans to be natural without clothes. That is why my characters are nude. I could dress them, but I do not want to.

G.B.: It seems to me that they are characters from mythology?

C.D.: Yes. It is a good excuse for me to go back to mythology or the Olympics. Everyone was in the nude. This is not particularly a way to advocate sexual freedom, the “women’s lib”¹¹¹. . . I am also a feminist.¹¹²

¹¹¹ *In the original French: le “women’s lib”. . .*

¹¹² *Je suis féministe aussi.*

Man has already taken from nature, no need to match the distress. I will start the action. Follow me fine ladies. *Allez bataillon . . .*¹¹³

This overwhelms me so much that the other day I painted a battle. Do you know what I painted? The Amazons crossing the Granique¹¹⁴ at the time of Alexander.

G.B.: My mythological references come by reading the ancient writings of Greek culture. Do you continue to read or are these memories from your school days?

C.D.: Both. I was confronted with war (WWI) in my youth. We recorded daily killings over four years. Paris was in the field of battle; Marnay was covered with soldiers from all over the world: there were Negroes, Malgaches (Madagascans), Indochinese, everyone was in Marnay. They were conscripted, they were anemic. They had been transported to another part of the world. They panicked, they were like animals in a cage as in the Jardin des Plantes. They took over the Seine to bathe.

G.V.: What is the relationship of this to the previous question?

C.D.: From this experience I was quickly accustomed to this type of nomadism. That the human flock was on earth in catastrophic abundance, ready for death . . . This is why my painting, my system, has an almost vengeful idea of human catastrophes. I want to restore an order that is at once peaceful, normal, clear, bright, but I do not want it be a concierge's system. I want it to be a philosophical system, be it Plato or Parmenides, who speaks of human beings that are beautiful, original . . . that are not "*raplapia*."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ From the French National Anthem.

¹¹⁴ The Granicus River. One of three battles fought between Alexander and the Persians. 334 B.C.E

¹¹⁵ *Raplaplat* = washed out, nearly finished, trite, uninteresting.

G.V.: You usually paint female characters . . .Your portraits are portraits of women . . .Why?

C.D.: Because I like women. It is a tribute that I owe them daily, to represent them . . .Yes, I have a look to affirm in a painting. The feminine look is always a thousand times more beautiful than the masculine gaze.

G.V.: But your feminine characters are more like goddesses than women of the day . . .It seems to me that by their finery, make-up, masks, posture, hairstyles, they make me think of mythological characters rather than real women.

G.B.: What were you going to say earlier about “girls”? What did they recount?

C.D.: They said: “Given the fact that your landscape paintings are a source of celebration, besides we do not see why we would also. . . ?” So I replied: “I do not paint from live models.” They were a little distressed. They said, “But what is your idea of a woman, is it a woman you have loved a lot, is it a Pygmalion?”

It is my turn, now that I have reached a canonical age, to create pleasing figures for myself, breasts that are bouncy, long fingers and vague looks ready for many things . . . They said to me: “But seriously . . .would you not be a little satyr. . .?”

G.V.: I wanted to talk to you about the fall of the angel because it is a theme that seems to come up often in your paintings. I wanted to know what that meant to you?

C.D.: The fall of the angel is a type of liberation of chance. Chance for me is controllable to a certain extent if one puts oneself in a completely receptive state, the state of moderation. I always come back to my expression: to be able to put things right and square. The T-square is a tool that generates constructions with the right angle and has the least chance of error and the best chance of ensuring stability.

So for me, the angel is about this: an ideal direction that gives you stability because it is powerful like the T-square. To make things happen, you can not dismiss it, you have to bring your system back to the T-square. The angel is me or the angel - the other - the opposing angel who envelops me to stir up or impute all my ideas, my decisions. The angel can take them, accept them and return them to me when I want. One is, as you saw, on the straw mill in a pitiful state. (referring to the painting, **The Wounded Angel**). And the other is there without having to pass through the mysterious laws of divinity.

It is one and the other. You know that in one, there is the other. We are surrounded by the other.

G.V.: But I do not understand this theme of the fall very well.

C.D.: Are you confused: Is it “**Icarus**” or “**The Wounded Angel**”?

G.V.: For me it is about the same theme. Falling Icarus, Wounded Angel, falling kite.

C.D.: The Wounded Angel is stable, he is on his millstone.

G.V.: Yes, but he is falling!

C.D.: We do not know much. Perhaps he climbed onto the millstone by a ladder that had been left behind and he climbed . . . There are a thousand things. . . Of course, I am the master of the situation, given that there is humor and a marked “misinterpretation” made by a dreadful immaturity. These things mark you forever. To be denounced as “absurd” in a class that burst out laughing at your stupidity . . . It was something that marked you forever. “What did you mean the . . .” and he was reading your paper, so everyone was laughing. It was something. . . All in Latin, it was huge . . . sometimes you used your imagination. . . but they no longer had any relation with Latin, with French, or with history.

G.B.: The “**Oiseaux**”, when did you paint that?

C.D.: In 1930 . . .My first painting.

G.B.: Was this the first spontaneous inspiration . . .or did you work on it for a long time which evoked something marvelous for you . . .?

C.D.: Yes, It evoked the world of ideas. Ideas that you do not just know but sense. You have them in a kind of logical construction. They appear, tree ideas for example. They will appear to you in the form of an image that you can make complete or incomplete as you wish. If you want to define them well, you have scientific words. That the tree is a palm tree, that the tree is a flowering . . .what you want. And all of a sudden, you realize something is missing. The detail is imaginable like everything. This small detail, once you have it highly condensed, becomes the image of your tree by consistently gathering your small details. . . which often deepens your reflection. So, accumulate small details. That is how I painted **Les Oiseaux**. Detailed ideas came back, which were in a kind of . . .you have seen, there is a drawing in it: like a garland! The birds are the leaves of this garland, which would be detached from a nonexistent tree. Then the birds fall to the ground, come back, fly away. . .and maybe that is why I painted them, because I realized that a diagonal air composition gave me a space not easily filled with other than ideal elements. The material elements that you want to collect in a construction. When for example, you do a still life, when you make a landscape. . . you immediately have a tendency to paint everything so as to block the angles, to limit your image and to fill it up as quickly as possible so that spontaneity is valid. All of a sudden you think you realize that spontaneity, like cinema, has a kind of value that it does not have. It is a terrible prejudice to believe that an instant photo is the truth. So for me, this big picture of **Les Oiseaux** was proof.

Ah! I told myself, here are the ideas that hooked themselves on this intangible wall, which in this windy space fills a whole country. . .and here is ancient Greece, here is the Greek idea of sacred Greece.

G.B.: Was it essential to put in characters?

C.D.: Ah! Yes, exactly! It is the insincere hunter and the insincere fisherman. It is the insincere hunter who comes with captured birds(game birds) and a dog who will save them, it is completely useless. And the fisherman who has a net to catch the fish but can not capture the birds. These are the kinds of misunderstandings and false readings which make the discussion or dialogue completely closed. Your painting exists, it makes everyone laugh. It is even said: “ There is something there, and we will think about it.”

G.B.: You are still a painter that has been traumatized by your Latin teacher.

G.V.: . . .I understood that you sometimes paint very dark paintings, sometimes very clear paintings, and you alternate regularly. Do you do it deliberately or to benefit. . .

C.D.: My mood? Is it my mood? Can a color reflect a mood? I do not believe. . .

G.V.: No, not a mood, but a search . . .

C.D.: When you are a Parisian painter, you live on a street with paintings like the rue de Seine. . .you look at the storefronts even if sometimes there are people who annoy you. Even if the picture dealer who looks at you and wants to know what you are doing today, can you stop by and see him and talk about such and such . . .This takes away some of the joy of painting. . .The fact is, I often come home and say: “Well, I just saw a painting with white . . .I am going to see if that white works for me.

So we start painting with the white. It is not imitating, but all of a sudden, you have a kind of feeling - you can not remember at all what was being painted - but you do remember a contrast that was quite rare. So you go back home, to your box of colors. . .and then it happens that in your box of colors, next to the color you were looking for, there are other colors

that are almost as white. So you paint clear. You are caught in a kind of habit . . . imitation without plagiarism, imitation from research. You say to yourself: This effect is accomplished through tricks!

So you invent. . . As if it were your technique, you make an interchange.

G.V.: So in general you paint dark?

C.D.: I tend to paint rather dark, with contrasts. But note, this is a kind of uniform hue, uniformity in which the forms are not well distinguished, this also works. But there are no rules for this.

POSTSCRIPT

Excerpts from Dominique Daguet's¹¹⁶ writing on Claude Domec.

Yes, for some of us, Claude Domec. . . is among the living legends of those whose works are necessary for us.

(he is). . .the one that Marnay's birds name between them:

*le naute de ces bois
le gardien des rives,
le veilleur des nymphes*

et

*le batelier du miroir des forets,
le guetteur des aubes,
l'emerite godiller de bachot*

*the navigator of these woods
the guardian of the river banks,
the watcher of the nymphs*

and

*the awakener of dreams
the boatman of the forest mirror
the lookout of dawn,
the practiced sculler of the small ferry-boat*

¹¹⁶ Dominique Daguet (b. 1938). French writer, poet, journalist. Founder of Les Cahiers bleus. **Claude Domec**. in Les Cahiers bleus. printemps-rte 81. p. 110-111.

Claude Domec succeeded in piercing the ancient arcana of wax painting.

This mystery is singular because the alliance between the technique and the spirit of the work is profound. It inscribes Claude Domec in the history of painting as an individual of genius, out of time but perfectly adapted to his time.

To this day, Claude Domec has not ceased to give reason to the winds, to the rains. These rains that the language of the Aube knows so well how to describe and name. Nor to all the suns, more pale on certain days of January to those most incandescent of July. To continually test the intuition of the contemplations of childhood, that the apparently strongest, hardest, most resistant materials or constructions of the hand can suddenly melt and participate in the spiritual nature of the world; light. It was necessary that the painter seal an alliance between air and matter.

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