

“Tresse du Lait” (Braid of Milk) 1.80 by 1.40 oil on linen.

STYLISTIC ILLUMINATION:

By Birgit Urmson

In her large tableau In “Tresse de Lait” Irena Chrul leads us into a mysterious surreal world, that at the same time seems palpably real. We are invited into a bare-walled room of strict perpendiculars occupied by strange beings. A large industrial lamp assures familiar stability. It dominates the center and looms over a solid and coherent patch of white and black floor tiling, set in recognizable patterning. The lamp imparts an industrial sobriety, but touches of pinks and whites on the walls remind us that we are in world of painterly imagination where space is rendered ambiguous through tantalizing interplay between stability and emptiness.

“Entering” is not quite the right word for encountering this space because, although not immediately obvious at first view, tectonic construction is fragmented and unreliable. One’s view is drawn immediately to the room’s distal features, which are firmly formed and colored. As attention moves toward the foreground and the mind seeks recognizable reality, one notices a floating, and then finally, in the palpable nearness of extreme foreground, a bottomless infinity. A large window admits bright light and beacons us to the reality hiding just beyond. Another window, stacked precisely beneath, insinuates another spatial reality that remains unsaid, perhaps contradictory. Gravity is teased.

Figures, beings of fantasy sequestered in this ambiguous space, each is distinct in its “Gestalt”, and is further distinguished by its coloring. The seated figure, closer and more intimate, with humanoid face of blood-drained grey-green complexion, long neck and huge nose has eyes and head concealed and weighed down. The texture of its enormous pinkish headgear reminds one of porous rock lying under rippling water. The lizard-like figure in the background, standing tall in regal yet nondescript headgear is garbed in sumptuous shining habit rendered in glowing pink with touches of white. With imposing elegant plait, it seems to dominate. Expounding on the popular 17th century genre, *nature morte*, a disheveled avian corpse in the foreground with shiny breast feathers in pearly grey-blue, the color of faded life, achingly beautiful, completes the triad. The figures exist each its own realm, isolated from each other, clearly placed and in a state of suspension between life and death, movement and stillness. Assembled in consistent, alluring color and light, they are in communion, transforming, metamorphosing, revealing, concealing, and denying us answers and clues to their meaning. And yet the meaning is tantalizing present.

“Entering” this tableau is a virtual visit, a mental adventure, is an encounter within this space. Light, streaming through the large windows, soars over all objects like a veil and renders the space full of magic, a light of the soul beaconing us into world. Exquisite union of color, light and brush intrigue us with brilliance. Tectonics, forms and textiles in their blues, pinks, greens, grays and the consistent milky haze form this world of art, where beauty is put in the service of disturbing juxtaposition and

unbearable in reality. Such an encounter leaves us delighted and at the same time, relieved that it is such.

INTERPRETIVE RESPONSE

By Claire Wood

Haunting ghostliness rendered in detailed realism, plains of calming stillness punctuated by rich painterly activity; both are hallmarks of Chrul's mastery of clarity and consistency of vision. How does one interpret her vision? A disappearing checkered floor floats, a hanging lamp that seems to dissolve, running down the canvas and splitting it in two, a diagonal wall with two windows vertically stacked above each other that divides the picture again, a rickety pipe on cracked wall, and a few horizontals link the painting to our world. Its poetic emptiness and spaces filled with stillness seems to bid us to take time and feel, contemplate and watch dust settle. Yet, the tranquility is active. The painting's space is tightly bound, almost claustrophobic, with the vertical overcoming the horizontal, which, disturbingly, seems to be melting away before us. Each figure, as if imprisoned, lives and dies for itself. The sumptuously realistic image on the right, a fallen bird-like figure, speaks of defeat as it lies in anguished sprawl, while once it flew. On the left sits another figure, larger in scale, contrasting in affect and more ghostly in appearance, more an apparition rendered with paucity of actual painted substance. One senses serenity. Its calming classic blue robe comports importance. It looms frighteningly, a suggestion of high counsel or authority, a reminder of the idealized, the internalized, of sacred figures and icons. A third figure, reddish beige in hue and reptilian in form stands in the background. Aggressive and alert, as if on guard, it stands and exudes tension between action and stillness. Its texture is tactile, fabric-like, and suggestive of blood. Is this the soul's warrior part, the part that destroys for the sake of renewal? Is it a hero, or a monster? The figure stands ready to quicken with meaning. Chrul has given form to the formless, that we ourselves recognize and know within ourselves. The painting frames the realm of the spirit in a realism that grows as one indulges in it.

Whenever one enters the painting, the journey awakes intense, agonizing awareness of beauty and fear, tragedy and despair, hope and search for something important. An open window offers grace, light, hope or escape into parallel universes of beauty and mystery. Non-rational figments and unexpected juxtapositions produce a powerful effect devoid of simplistic didacticism. Chrul takes one on a journey toward exploration of human experience, toward making one's own rich discoveries.

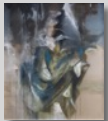
Claire Wood



Tresse de lait, 2013 • Oil on linen • 140 cm x 180 cm | 55" x 71"



Lullaby 8, 2013 • Oil on linen • 140 cm x 120 cm | 55" x 47" ●



IRENA CHRUL
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IMPRESSART
Marc Hébert - curator