

MARY-ANN BEALL'S PROCESS

Discovering the frescoes of Pompeii was for me a decisive aesthetic experience ; it fashioned my conception of life as an artist. I was moved by the vision of the layers of time beneath the patina, the still luminous pigments imprisoned in the whitewash, the convergence between the density of the walls and the transparency of the air. The emotion that I feel in front of frescoes is akin to something larger, a balance between sturdiness and frailty, something I have been striving to achieve in my work.

Since 1983, always under commission from both the public or the private sector, I have worked with architects, city councils, businesses, and private individuals. Within this framework, I propose interventions that are always freely inscribed within space (reception lobbies, for example) rather than laid out on pre-determined surfaces. Volume is always an active element in these projects ; it allows for both an echo and a continuity : the white colour of the walls is an intimate part of the sprawling murals that bring the place to life ; the mobile sculptures (Ecole Jules-Ferry, Omni in the Maison Rouge Foundation) and the different installations (Rideau de larmes/Curtain of tears) are always conceived in direct relationship with the space they occupy and transform ; their size and their shape vary according to the air and void necessary to their breathing.

Through the years, I have been developing plastic realizations that address our several senses ; they are invitations to touch, to listen, to move, to walk across, and to set in motion the various devices on display (Medusa/Jellyfish, Totem). I endeavour to create a dialogue between the work inscribed in a given space and space itself. The aesthetic experience and the relationship thus established between the work of art and those who live in it or walk through it becomes a locus where encounter and exchange are made possible, where people learn to live with – and within – the very work of art.

With my paintings, I feel the same need and I do enjoy playing with the frames : around, in front, behind, between and in-between, front and back (Rêver peut-être/Perchance to dream, Série à géométrie variable/Variable Geometry Series, Metamorphosis). For a few years, I have been working on series using various surfaces and materials – wood, canvas, paper, magnets, pigments, whitewash... – in search of a tactile and luminous contrast through a choice of textures. The rough aspect of the materials remains, but my purpose is to transform them through my work and the way I arrange them and bring them together. This is indeed the very essence of a mixed technique which erases the rigid boundaries between watercolour, oil, etching and sculpture, and tends to dissolve the immutable separation between the work of art, the wall and the viewer.

In most of my work, things come from water ; for each layer, I use little material in order to get a smooth effect. What I am interested in is an effect of transparency comparable to the transparency of the water surface, which allows to guess what lies at the bottom. And this, in an attempt to give an unusual depth to a flat surface.

Some of my realizations are made on free canvas, sometimes superimposed or assembled with other materials, or sewn together. They float on the wall as if to free themselves from it. To me, they are sections (Embers, Sail, Blue Note, Blue-green, The poet's soul, Sections n°1, 2, 3...)

Another one of my series, made from cut and assembled wood pieces, is to be considered as fragments, some kind of experimental bits and pieces. The shape of these fragments play with the wall. Layer after layer, I work with the material so that it may suggest traces and become a palimpsest (Cascade 1, Targui, Targuia, l'accorde-brume/mist tuner).

Arches 300g paper gave life to a series – still in progress – of large formats. I have been working on these pieces with pigments and a lot of water, with the glue of the paper seeping back to the surface to fix the pigment. To finalize some of these pieces, I worked the fresh pigments with a steel rod, and thus managed to concentrate the colour with this mere gesture. I sometimes reworked some of these pieces once they were dry with graphite.

It seemed to me essential to keep the velvety feel of the rag paper free of the barrier of glass, and I decided to frame these pieces otherwise. For some of them, I created a woven paper frame, which became part of the work itself (Cascade 2, Passage, Thumb). For others, I chose raw old iron scraps, hard metal, and the piece, so fragile by contrast, floats in front of the wall, within this cold frame, as if in an open cage.

Pulling these various threads leads one to consider my pieces and installations as an abstract sensory invitation. I strive to call on the sensitive memory of the viewer and allow him to make his own, or rather to tame, what is in front of him, looking at him, what is there as well as some other thing : forever already there, something else.

With very few words, Mark Rothko wonderfully expressed what I am attempting to achieve: *"I became a painter because I wanted to raise painting to the level of poignancy of music and poetry."*