

Perrotin

Galerie Perrotin celebrates its 25th anniversary

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EXHIBITION

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GALERIE EMMANUEL PERROTIN CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY

BY ROXANA AZIMI

— Sure he can be annoying when he struts around, gets irritated by an inappropriate question or an unflattering article. Yes, you are free not to appreciate his rather baroque or kawai artists, or his big names in the most speculative sector of the market... But in spite of all that, no one can deny that the Parisian gallerist Emmanuel Perrotin has had a highly impressive career so far. How many times has a meteoric rise to fame preceded a fall, as yet another cock of the walk gets taken down a peg or two by the harsh realities of life. But hats off to Emmanuel Perrotin for 25 years with neither false notes nor skeletons in the cupboard! 25 years during which he has climbed the rungs of the ladder of success two by two. The former assistant to the young dealer Charles Cartwright has become a professional who is on first name terms with the greats, which brings us to the matter in question: Lille municipality has invited Emmanuel Perrotin to celebrate his anniversary at the Tripostal with its 6,000 m2 surface area. The first reaction to such an invitation is surely a raised eyebrow. Is it really the role of our elected representatives to promote the career of a gallerist who, with galleries in Paris, New York and Hong Kong certainly has enough room to celebrate his anniversary in style and what's more internationally? Other longer-standing names in the business didn't receive the same honours. And yet, despite the rather prickly sensation that this whole operation gives rise to, you have to admit that the exhibition is a frank success as the succession of works on show contribute to a skilfully organised dialogue between artists. There are two defining moments: the room which associates works by Claude Rutault and Germaine Richier and another, like some dark nursery rhyme, where the works of Klara Kristalova, Sun Yuan and Peng Yu meet. Do you find rather strange the sheer amount of space allotted all of a sudden to Damien Hirst? He has as much space and as many works on show as Takashi Murakami and yet, Emmanuel Perrotin has only exhibited the British artist once, back in 1991. Emmanuel Perrotin admits that he is 'hitting on' the artist, although that's not the expression he would have chosen: he has been negotiating



Sun Yuan & Peng Yu, Angel, 2008, silica gel, fiberglass, 180 x 220 cm.
Photo: Roxana Azimi.

for several years now to put on an exhibition that Hirst's overbooked schedule has unfortunately so far precluded. Nor are the market's 'hottest' artists necessarily the best served: Maurizio Cattelan only has one work on show. In the absence of an entire room just for them, each of the gallery's protégés shows off a monumental artwork, for example with Daniel Firman's precariously and almost miraculously balanced giant elephant. The artist, who joined the gallery in 2009, describes working with the gallerist as follows: "Emmanuel raised my visibility on the international scene. Moreover, there is an almost festive side to his gallery. We often all get together. He is generous and attentive. When I have an idea for a new piece, I talk him through it and he says 'yes' without hesitation. He is a real go-getter."

So what does this retrospective exhibition represent for our 'go-getter'? "Time out to think about the next 25 years more calmly" is his answer. Calmly? Really? Emmanuel Perrotin is always going somewhere fast, his life is stressful as he works day-by-day to spread his hold: this is definitely not a naturally serene person. "You're right, serenity is not my thing, but I don't intend to open a new gallery every five minutes somewhere in the world", he continues. "I am used to not taking the time to draw breath. CONTINUED ON P 7

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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6 *I have got nothing to complain about. I'm very lucky. I choose to put myself in this situation, but I have no choice over whether an exhibition space is available or not. Each time, it was one or two years too soon. I suffered each time.* He does not own the buildings in Hong Kong and New York where his galleries are situated and he still has fifteen years to pay on the fabulous Parisian premises on Rue de Turenne, to which will soon be added a further 700 m2 showroom on the same street. Yet another space. *"The aim is not to have more and more square metres to exhibit in",* he maintains. *"It is the means to an end, to do a better job representing my artists. When you have a showroom, you can highlight the work of the most flourishing artists and defend the younger ones all year round at the gallery."* And what drives him? *"To see through what I have started; to offer my artists a satisfactory service and participate in all the good things that happen to them."* And probably to ensure they don't go looking elsewhere, because the market's big cheeses are constantly on the prowl... To such an extent that the American gallerist Larry Gagosian manoeuvred to make sure that Perrotin did not move into Hong Kong's famous Pedder Building, where he is based. But isn't Emmanuel Perrotin's ambition to be the French Gagosian? *"Not at all",* he replies. *"I am 45 years old and I couldn't possibly compare myself to someone has a long past behind him and means that*

are far beyond mine. I am trying to get bigger by developing my activity so that I don't feel Gagosian breathing down my artists' necks. We are always in the shadow of somebody. In the case of Gagosian, it's probably the shadow of God himself." If he is indeed ambitious, Emmanuel Perrotin is undoubtedly less ferocious, less of a cold fish, less of a killer than his American competitor. The best we can wish him is not to wear himself out, or sink along the way and fail in the image of Sun Yuan & Peng Yu's fallen and ageing angel. ■

HAPPY BIRTHDAY GALERIE PERROTIN / 25 YEARS, until January 12th 2014, Tripostal, avenue Willy Brandt, 59,000 Lille. Tel. +33 (0)3 28 52 30 00, www.lille3000.eu

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