

Camille Henrot

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View of “*Est-il possible d’être révolutionnaire et d’aimer les fleurs?*” (Is it possible to be a revolutionary and love flowers?), 2012.

Camille Henrot’s latest exhibition, “*Est-il possible d’être révolutionnaire et d’aimer les fleurs?*” (Is it possible to be a revolutionary and love flowers?), is on view at Kamel Mennour Gallery in Paris until October 6. Here she discusses the ikebana-inspired sculptures in the show, the first of which premiered in “*Intense Proximity*,” the 2012 triennial at the Palais de Tokyo. Work by the Paris-based artist is also currently on view in “*A Disagreeable Object*” at SculptureCenter in New York, and will be included in the Biennale Benin from November 8, 2012 to January 13, 2013, and at Philadelphia’s Slought Foundation this November.

I’VE ALWAYS BEEN SUSPICIOUS OF FLOWERS. Two years ago, a member of my family died and I found myself making bouquets for the funeral. The truly consoling power of this deed allowed me to understand why I had been so prejudiced against flowers: They are compensation, and, as such, they’re presumably an impediment to rebellion—to action. In Marcel Liebman’s book *Leninism Under Lenin*, one of Lenin’s lieutenants asks: “Is it possible to be a true revolutionary and love flowers?”

Around the same time as the funeral, I became interested in ikebana. I had just moved to New York and ikebana seemed a way I might pay homage to—or, rather, synthetically and visually give form to—the books from my personal library still in Paris. It took up so much of my headspace that I decided it was incompatible with all my other artistic practices, and most especially with the production of material objects.

Over the summer of 2011, I composed 150 ikebana arrangements in tribute to the books that make up my personal library. I decided to devote the next two years to continuing this project. The relationship between literature and flowers revealed itself as all the more pertinent when I reread the lieutenant’s response to his own question further on: “You start by loving flowers and soon you want to live like a landowner, who, stretched out lazily in a hammock, in the midst of his magnificent garden, reads French novels and is waited on by obsequious footmen.”

What spoke to me most about ikebana was its vocation to create a “privileged space” that offers a remedy to the discontinuity produced by life’s upheavals. For me, this privileged space relates directly to Michel Foucault’s idea of heterotopia—the best example of which is a library, where the variety of thoughts and genres constitutes an area of freedom, a reservoir of pleasures that remains impervious to external events. It also made me think of Michel Leiris’s definition of art as a “set of privileged situations.”

Obviously, my practice of ikebana, even though it belongs to something that is itself nontraditional (the Sogetsu school), is based on certain naiveties and even some misinterpretations of the fundamentals of this art. The presence of such errors, though, is perfectly integrated into my approach—it’s one of the themes of this project and more generally of my output as a whole. I like to remove segments of culture in partial and unfinished manners in order to grow them in the fertilizer of my work.

— As told to Simone Menegoi