

Gaël Davrinche

The official birth of Painting

In 2000, Gaël Davrinche took part in the exhibition *Sincères Félicitations* (Curator: Anne Tronche), which presented the work of students at the Paris Fine Arts School. The board of examiners were unanimous in their reception and congratulations of his work.

Gaël Davrinche's initial works comprised an analysis and transcription, onto large-format canvases and paper, of the primary gesture that gives rise to a child's drawing. According to Davrinche, painting is inspired by the primary representation to which children have access.

Subsequently, in around 2003-2004, via a series of works directly adapted from those of the great masters in art history, Velázquez, Vermeer, Ingres, Manet and Holbein, Gaël Davrinche produced a gallery of portraits of those referential artists. After 'dissecting' the original canvas, the artist projects it on a large scale. The original *Self-portrait* of Van Eyck measures 20 x 30 cm. The artist furnishes us with a work measuring 180 x 160 cm, a recurrent format in his work. Canvases are painted on a flat surface, on the floor *'using broad gestures, with the brush or hand, so as to better release tension'*.

In an approach in which his attitude is neither one of irreverence, nor of dumb fascination, the artist seeks to confront his great models, to *'dépeindre et repeindre'* (portray and repaint), as he himself says, as if to unravel their secret. Indeed, he observes and attempts to release the mystery, the decisive touch, which, in the portrait of *Philip IV* by Velázquez or *Girl with a pearl earring* by Vermeer, defines the moment of grace in painting.

As the French art critic, Philippe Piguet, underlines in his preface to the catalogue for the exhibition *Gaël Davrinche. Dépeindre et Repeindre* (Portrayal and Repainting), *'When it became a question of borrowing from the very history of art, he naturally turned to Velásquez and Las Meninas, in particular. Not only was he guided in his work by the example of Picasso, but the physiognomy and appearance of the duennas and the young girls, both sumptuous and grotesque, only served to stimulate his appetite... When he takes on Van Gogh, whom he considers, by his own admission, to have thoroughly 'insulted', or when he tackles Van Eyck's magnificent Portrait of a Man in a Red Turban (which some say is a self-portrait) displayed at London's National Gallery, Davrinche is communicating to us his overwhelming passion for painting.'*

Through an exercise in painterly substance and construction, so near, and yet so far from his referential elders, what the artist is seeking can be found in that one vital, decisive gesture, the signature that witnessed the official birth of painting.