

The Watchman

A review of the reflective process and note of intent

What first brought us together was a phrase chosen ahead of time by the reflection group: "everything passes". How do these simple, everyday words resonate with us? What do they inspire in us? What sensations? What thoughts? What memories too?

It is undeniable that, beyond the context in which these words are spoken at Le Blosne, they have a strong imaginative charge. Everything passes... it'll pass... pass or fail... it has passed... over... erased... no trace left... The poetic journey can go pretty far using just words as a vector. That's how we started. Then came the time for perhaps a slightly more metaphysical resonance. Everything passes... The seasons, the generations, clouds, flocks of birds, the breeze on our skin... Our lives, in short. Think of the precariousness of the human condition and our time on Earth.

The image of these little watchmen quickly found its way into our imaginings. Their role is to pass things on. They are passers-on of an echo that goes from one end of the neighbourhood to the other, of a handful of notes, of substances which themselves will enable their consumers to pass into the next realm. Escaping reality, making a break for it, flying away... Isn't everyone trying to make their own kind of passage into another space, forgetting their lives sometimes, stepping into a different world, getting out of here, leaving their body even if just for a moment? Each of us has an opinion on this subject and places we escape to that belong to us, and this is why we don't want to judge, bringing a sense of total clarity shorn of all naivety.

But who are these watchmen? Where do they come from? What are their dreams and hopes? What do we know about them? What can we learn about them in such a short space of time? Nothing, or very nearly nothing... A shy exchange of smiles to reassure them on the day the photographer followed us down the street, nothing more. A twinkle in the eye. And, deep down, a huge vulnerability. This is perhaps what we know about them, what we have shared with them. Outside of this exchange, we looked through them, our gaze intersecting their bodies. They are just outlines of people, all dressed in black, cap on, sweatshirt on, hood up... I'm here but I'm not. It's me but it could just as easily be someone else. It feels miraculous and ultimately immensely sad to suddenly spot a face on the corner of a street: they are so young.

These figures are redolent of dreams too, of contemplation and silence. Nevertheless, there is a certain gentleness to their presence. No honking motorcycles or MP3s, no noisy gatherings during the day, evening or night. Each one is set at his post, like frogs on the edge of the pond. Hours pass by in absolute stillness, then a heron passes and a second later they are deep in the mire. Ten minutes later, their silent map realigns itself, identical and immutable whatever the time of day. There is a great loneliness, if truth be told. So much time spent waiting, doing nothing, sitting on a

bollard, an old log, a broken chair. Shipwrecked lives, stranded dreamers... The only trace of their existence is two or three discarded cans each evening.

The melancholic dreamer...

Suddenly, we see in a poem by Apollinaire a poetic echo of their loneliness. Every day, it feeds our thoughts, comforts us, consoles us after a certain fashion.

After all, it's terribly hard to be a powerless spectator.

It is this observation, this emotion, that brings us together. What to do? What to say? How can we take on board this suffering? And most importantly, how can we rise above it?

This emotion wounds us, each of us in a very different way. Mylène most of all. It's terrible to see our society fail to some degree every day. And then, even though we are filled with love and kindness, in the long run these rubbish bins dumped at your door are exhausting, this constant trafficking, this misery that no one seems to care about. For Sylvie, who isn't here as a politician and is therefore deprived of action: her driving force in life, what gives her strength in the face of misery. And for Hervé, wouldn't seeking poetry in the midst of this distress be lying in some way, or just complacent? Nothing can be hard when you know you can go home on Wednesday evening.

Faced with this sadness, these labels - the resident, the politician, the artist - very quickly overwhelm and suffocate us. Yet no - no, before we put on these social masks, we are living beings, a man and two women who aren't so different at heart. And what brings us together is a shared disquiet faced with the little watchmen.

He - the watchman - will be the subject of our work.

What can we offer him?

That's our real question.

Something that's for him. Something big, huge, or at least not conceptual, that's for sure. Why not simply a portrait? Yes, that's it - a portrait! But how do you make a portrait of an invisible man, a silhouette? Carve his precarious nature in stone? No, it wouldn't suit him and it would be presumptuous too. Looking for material... We need to find the right material... The ideal one would be words cast out into the wind, fragile and ephemeral like his, but we want our creation to remain part of the neighbourhood, at least for a while.

We don't want a passing gift, but a beautiful one, visible and available to all!

Glass! That's the solution! Transparency! Visible and invisible at the same time. I'm here but I'm not. You see me but you don't see me. Let's look for a glass wall, a big one, and draw the Watchman on it: that's our project.

From the outset, the Conservatoire de Musique seems to be the ideal place. First of all, it's beautiful, with its large windows like huge blank pages reflecting the sky. This infinitely positive image is a symbol of hope and openness. And creating a poetic interpretation of the little Watchman in this temple to culture would no doubt be the most beautiful of gifts, the greatest of symbols.

In practical terms, we will use a decal. A simple line, something very stripped back, an interpretation, not overly realistic, like Hervé's sketches. Probably white, to blend better with the grey and white tones of the façade. A discreet counterpoint to this Watchman might be a few birds in flight - one, two, three, no more than that. He will have his head held high, looking out at the horizon. And finally, we will give him those profoundly hopeful lines written by Apollinaire. They will be handwritten, as fragile as the sketch of him. As fragile as their destiny.

"Twilight will never beat the dawn

Let the evenings surprise us but let's live in the mornings

Let's scorn the immutable like stone or gold"

Meetings during the residency

Starting on Thursday, we met with the project's research leadership (Marion and Vanessa) from EUR CAPS and the contact person from the reflection group (Lisette).

On Friday, we were interviewed by local radio - Quartier des Ondes - then met with Tali Serruya (a local researcher) and spoke with some members of the reflection group in the evening.

On Saturday, we held photo and video sessions with Anne-Cécile Estève, followed by a historical tour of the neighbourhood with sociologist André Sauvage.

Authorship of the work

Hervé wants all three of us to sign the work. We will discuss this collectively.

Proposed title

Le Guetteur (The Watchman)