

"L'école du Gris" (The School of Grey)

Could they have lost the joy of their art?

These pictures are riddled with melancholia, keeping away from colourful sparkle. Austere, close to the monochrome, they are seen through the tainted glasses used to watch solar eclipses. Under the pretext of the right tone, the painters cover nature under a layer of plaster as fine as rubble dust. The trivial and heavy severity of their dull palette draws them too deeply into a servile imitation of the natural colouring of our climate: mud, opaque fog and "dog weather". Now, according to a proposition supported by Eugène Delacroix, better judge than anyone, the great colourists are those who do not make the local tone.

You neglect colour; your backgrounds are indecisive, your shadows opaque; you know it: a colour is nothing in itself, it lives through contact, through pairing. One gets the impression that grey, to you, is a refuge for laziness, poorly masking your wilful neglect.

This conspicuous grey, this poor, badly applied, faded, washed out, chalky and milky colour finds its source in a natural atony belonging to the school of blandness (l'école du fade).

There is only one painter who knows how to use the faintest shades of ash-grey. This painter is Death.

"L'école du Gris" (The School of Grey)

Well, Eugène Delacroix had founded that of vermillion.

The paintings have little shine, but they are rich in meaning: they resist the seduction of imagining things other than they are, refusing to flatter the audience's taste by choosing the so-called exquisite hour to pamper small pictures.

L'"Ecole du gris" (the School of Grey) places the feeling higher than the pure colour. The result is a quiet and melancholic force: a mysterious veil conceals the effects, as if to keep their charm for attentive sensitivities. The reduction of the palette to grey tones produces works of extreme softness, where nuances combine with the expression of emotions. The painters seek the finesse of sleeping tones, wilfully doused colourings, almost until decolouration. They enjoy harmonising fine greys, deep blacks, vigorous blues, undefinable beiges, celebrating the caresses of infinite nuances.

But, the manner is not the art. Poor colours, modulated with great subtlety, can appear light. There are in certain works by Corot very luminous tones in the painting, which, considered on their own, are relatively dark greyish tones.

These singing greys, successively beige or blue, mauve or green, give the works an obvious distinction.