

**Exhibition**

from June 9 to November 4, 2018

**Rohan Gallery**

Landerneau

EXHIBITION JOURNAL

# The Landscapes of François Dilasser



## The Artist

« I like when the forms appear during the work. [...] when the brush stroke gives birth to an unplanned form... the life that is manifested. »

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Alain Le Nouail, *Portrait de François Dilasser*, 14 mars 1983, collection Frac Bretagne © SAIF

François Dilasser (1926-2012) is an artist from Lesneven (Finistère). In 1943, whilst flicking through a book on Paul Gauguin, the impact *The White Horse* had on him showed him that paintings can be released from reality to become an expression of a thought, through their colour or composition. "I remember that day as though I was still there," he explains. A self-taught painter, he completed his first "abstract" piece, composed of bursts and strikes, in 1956 and began working full-time as an artist in the early 1970s. His first fifteen years were marked by the influence of famous artists, such as Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Rembrandt, Philip Guston and Roger Bissière. He was also surrounded by writers, with Charles Juliet and Jean-Pierre Abraham his confidants. A keen reader with a close connection to the literary world, he quickly developed a love of words, reflected in the choice of titles for his artworks.

His system of representation was enriched by visits to museums and his knowledge of the history of painting, as well as walks in the land surrounding his home and studio, and the countryside and seaside of North Finistère. Dilasser's work reveals not landscapes painted on a pattern but a collection of thoughts and feelings, experiences interwoven during his studio time. Walking, observing and thinking, these activities tie together François Dilasser's connection with the world, at the root of secretive and sensitive sketched and painted work. His career developed after 1972, with exhibitions in France and Europe, followed quickly by representation in galleries exhibiting his work.

His art was the subject of two monographs (*Dilasser*, text by Jean-Marc Huitorel, La Différence, 1990, and *François Dilasser*, Editions Palantines, 1999) and numerous exhibition catalogues, including the vast catalogue of the Brest and Bordeaux Museums of Fine Art, *Dilasser*, 2008-2009. François Dilasser frequently worked with writers, such as Paul Louis Rossi for *Inscapes* (1994), and with his partner Antoinette Dilasser for *Journal Hors Temps* in 2004.

## The Exhibition

The Ville de Landerneau and the Frac Bretagne are continuing a partnership begun in 2015 to present a personal exhibition of François Dilasser at the Rohan Gallery, with landscapes - a key subject for the artist - as the guiding theme. He said in 1999 : The view of the sea, the movement of walking, this helps me think about the painting... It is without a doubt the sea seen from the shore, the sea-shore relationship, which fascinates me, which makes me want to paint. I am attracted to the relationship, the way forms resemble each other, those of trees, houses of rocks, clouds. With paintings and drawings from the artist's studio, and public and private collections, the exhibition is punctuated by poetic titles, including *Promenade côtière (Coastal Walk)*, *À travers champs (Across Fields)*, and *L'écriture des Vagues (the Writing of Waves)*, and reveals the paradox of work which is at once anchored in its old country, and, escaping to the unknown, stretches to an end that is relentlessly evaded. Each piece shows the development of the artist's thought, the creative process.

The exhibition continues into the public area, with an open-air exhibition, evoking inspiring places and featuring extracts of texts written by his writer friends, portraits and studio images.



François Dilasser, *Métamorphoses*, 1993  
Collection Frac Bretagne © Adagp, Paris 2018



The first exhibition area shows the importance of the studio space as a place of research for the artist and highlights the serial dimension of his work and the pivotal role of sketchbooks. It reveals François Dilasser's interest in the repetition of actions. This would lead him to develop many pieces from a single motif (between 40 and 50). He would then sort through what had been produced and destroy part of it. He would then move on to another thematic element. Subjects follow one another, but there are always shifts in meaning and transformations from one form to another, from figures to landscapes.



François Dilasser, *Retour de l'Île de Sein, fin mai 1993*  
Collection particulière © Adagp, Paris 2018

### Sketchbooks

In these "holidays" between two motifs, Dilasser sketched whilst awaiting his next subject. It was a time of freedom and research, until he found himself gripped by a new subject. The sketch is the "nerve centre" (Jean-Marc Huitorel), the crux of his work.

The sketchbooks show drawings completed on the Ile de Batch, the island of Ushant, the Arrée mountains in 1985, Kerlouan, Guissény and Brignogan, Quiberon, the Cap de la Chèvre and Tas de Pois.

Dilasser tries to capture the structural lines of landscapes and the appearance of details, whilst working on the suspension of lines by varying the intensity of the pressure of the pencil or charcoal on the paper.

His drawing technique involves the abandonment of self. The artist gives free rein to his hand, echoing the great spontaneity of surrealist automatic writing.

### Arbres (Trees)

The first series of *Arbres* appeared in 1993 and presents round masses held up by thin trunks. In 1999, Dilasser returned to this allegorical, natural motif but with a very different approach, the tree becoming a form almost resembling a signpost. The tight composition and originality of the habit of each tree gives a portrait feel to these symbols of nature.

### Journal de promenade (Walking diary)

Between 1993 and 1995, and 1995 and 1996, François Dilasser kept a walking diary, filled with quickly painted annotations of landscapes. "It's an exercise, a very simple study that cannot later be changed as these notations are made one after the other on a large sheet. There is no option to scrap it if you don't get it right," the artist explained in an interview with Jean-Pierre Abraham. Dilasser worked little on matter and depth. He liked acrylic paint for the frontality of its mattness. His field was the plane. The plane is the place where colour is applied, where the action drawn is replicated.

### Baigneuses après Cézanne (Bathers after Cézanne)

These pieces, dating from 2004 and 2005, show Dilasser's never-ending interest in studying the painting of his peers. Bathers, a motif found throughout the history of art and the work of Paul Cézanne in particular, enabled the artist to copy and reinvent the composition of figures, as well as the effects of depth created by the wooded area.

At the center, like an axis, *La Mer Rouge III* or *Le Passage de la Mer Rouge* (1990), a painting confidently dominated by red, in which "navigating items", modules, appear and transform, creating "disruptively strange" relationships (Antoinette Dilasser).



François Dilasser, *Baigneuses, 2004-2005*  
Atelier, Lesneven © Adagp, Paris 2018  
Crédit photo : François Talairach

The next room invites visitors to observe paintings such as **Mis Du (The Black Months)** (1977), an enigmatically named work evoking winter, created through segmentation around an architectural pattern repeated in a dark setting, occasionally punctuated by flashes of red and blue.

**Yock** (1989), named after the island in the Finistère area of Landunvez, presents a collection of emerging rocks, animated by variations in a geometric découpage and a play on colours resembling a positive and negative film reel.

### **Le Jardin de mon père (My Father's Garden)**

With his paintings of gardens, begun in 1989, François Dilasser embarked on a study of an "inhabited" closed space, where intimacy organizes the elements it is composed of. In the series *Le Jardin de Mon Père*, an initial shape is subjected to a process of combination, permutation and assembly. The painter passes from one to many and creates effects of visual rhythms. Many of Dilasser's works are composed through the terracing of boxes, bringing the matrix of narrative figuration: a fragmentation of the painting into sequences creating an almost simultaneous tale. This system of episodic terracing recalls the method found in paintings from the late Middle Ages of telling the story of various episodes in the same story in a single image.

# Glossary

## **Acrylic**

A paint that emerged in Europe in the 1960s, whose pigments are mixed with synthetic resins. It can be diluted with water and dries fast, making it quicker to work with.

## **Self-taught**

Someone who taught themselves, without the help of a teacher.

## **Outline**

An operation, used in drawing and painting, to create a thick or thin line around the contour of a shape.

## **Compartmentalization**

The action of separating into enclosed and separate entities.

## **Drawing**

A technique which consists of tracing on a flat surface, generally paper, the representation of a shape, object or face, using appropriate tools (pencil, quill, charcoal, pastel, etc.). Linear, contour, profile, line, considered aesthetically.

## **Automatic writing**

A spontaneous method of writing using the unconscious, characterized by a state of letting go, between sleep and waking. Automatic writing was used by surrealists such as André Breton as a method of creating literary art. "Place yourself in the most passive or receptive state possible... quickly write without any preconceived subject, quick enough not to hold back or be tempted to re-read your work."

André Breton's definition of automatic writing given in *A Surrealist Manifesto* (1924).

## **Marouflage**

The action of attaching, using a very strong glue (traditionally maroufle), a thin, flexible support onto a backing frame to make it more stable and rigid.

## **Landscape**

Landscape defines the view perceived from a given position. François Dilasser's landscapes are neither naturalist nor designed to be an ode to nature.

## **Plane**

In geometric terms, a surface with two dimensions, width and length, measured orthogonally. In a painting, drawing or relief, a distinction is made between the foreground, background and middle ground, to create structure and suggest depth. François Dilasser's paintings frequently place all of the action on a single plane.

## **Series**

A suite, succession of artworks of an identical nature, which address the same theme, generally organized in a certain order.

## **Variation**

In both visual arts and music, and other fields, a production created around a theme which remains discernible despite the different methods, deviations and transformations.

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19 avenue André Mussat  
CS 81123  
F-35011 Rennes cedex

tél. +33 (0)2 99 37 37 93  
accueil@fracbretagne.fr  
www.fracbretagne.fr