

Pierre's Memory

The little boy's mesmerised gaze did not miss a beat of the visual feast in front of him. His great-uncle's dressmaking workshop had become a theatre for a marvellous performance which would remain with the boy for the rest of his life. First of all, there was the immense oak table, a vast space to be conquered. Adorned with a navy blue woollen cloth, it had become the topographical base for a thousand cabalistic signs. The big stitches of white cotton whipstitch divided up the fabric musically into a series of jerks. These interrupted strokes formed mysterious signs with bewitching rhythms. Then there was the muffled sound of the large scissors, the monastic resonance of the metal hitting the table, transforming it abruptly into a wooden echo chamber. It was in 1960, and the child was only ten years old. He was not yet aware that this aesthetic shock would influence his future work as an artist. Today, Pierre Courtois remembers this event with a troubling accuracy. And as he himself likes to point out, if his art has always placed great weight on lines, threads and stitches, it owes a great deal to this visit to his great-uncle's workshop.

What is the thread connecting these forty years of dedication to the visual arts? What connects the strangeness of the artist's first topographical drawings to the archaeological mysteries of his box-paintings? What are Pierre Courtois' utopian machines, so reminiscent of Leonardo Da Vinci's imaginings, trying to tell us? These compasses, set squares and crossbows that reinvent constantly the boundaries of measurement? How can one explain his obsession with vertical channels/axes, his endless battle against the oblivion of hours, his fascination for the line which delimits the world to draw our gazes towards that which we are looking at but do not see? Equally, what can one say about his falsely minimalist installations, which transform the individual's horizon into a sovereign view-finder with a better overall visibility. In the artist's words there is only one thread connecting all of his work: « le trait d'union » (the hyphen). Or, as Umberto Eco highlights it, to understand a work of art as a network of connections is to invite a variety of readings as much as to promote its opening onto the world. One thing is for certain: Pierre Courtois' works make us travel a great distance, and at the limits of the imagination's geography, anything is possible. Often, the Cartesian aspects become lyrical, and seriousness courts folly in a mad logic. On a given day in 1960, an intense emotion experienced in a dressmaker's workshop compelled a child to measure, in every sense of the word, the importance of all things and of their commensurable particularities. Once he became an artist, he began to transform the trait d'union into Ariadne's most beautiful thread.

Olivier Duquenne, 2012

Extracted from the monograph *Traits d'union*, Pierre Courtois, Published(Edited) Luc Pire, on 2012