

DAVID SALLE

DAVID SALLE / FRANCIS PICABIA

PARIS MARAIS

23 Jan 2013 - 23 Feb 2013



Exhibition from 23 January to 23 February 2013

Galerie Thaddeus Ropac is delighted to announce a David Salle/Francis Picabia exhibition which sets out to create a strong dialogue between new paintings by the American artist and a selection of works by Picabia (1879-1953). In their frequent comparison of the two artists, critics may have particularly dwelt on their shared use of superimposed images and its effect of semantic multiplication. Not so many know that Salle himself does not see things quite this way: "People have associated my work with his 'transparency' works - and, while I like them a lot, those are not the works that particularly influenced me."

Picabia's artistic career encompassed a kaleidoscopic range of experiments, and was characterised by a constant refusal to adhere to any one tendency. His status as a great champion of artistic freedom is precisely what attracts the American artist: "My attraction to Picabia is as a kindred spirit, not specifically as a stylist. When I first saw paintings of his from the 30s and 40s, I felt that I had no "direction" as to how to look at them. (...) I found this attitude liberating and exciting, free from good intentions - real anarchy!"

The painter and poet Picabia made free with his materials. Paintings and drawings like *Manga* (1933-33) and *Mélibée* (1932-1933) use the technique of superposition and evoke images that verge on dream. Here, art history cohabits with literature and fantasy, shepherds with Madonnas, the ancient world with more or less imaginary, idealised or contemporary portraits. Picabia went on to muddy the waters of bourgeois artistic propriety by introducing soft porn imagery: *La chienne de Baskerville*, (1932-33), *La femme au bouquet* (1942). These are the points on which the parallel with Salle's work is immediately striking.

David Salle is a major artist who brought a new conceptual language to painting in the 1980s. His large-format compositions surprised by their heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory associations, bringing them together on a single or two or three canvases. The elements he combines come from popular culture and Pop Art and juxtapose or intermix decorative, geometrical and figurative vocabularies. Like a complex mathematical equation, the meaning and power of these elements multiply, accumulate and divide up in a strange, hybrid manner, revealing the nature of our era and its incessant visual solicitations.

In the exhibition at Galerie Thaddeus Ropac, Salle presents himself as a maker of images, using animal motifs and ambiguous and strange human characters, but also female bodies in seductive poses. These images painted in black and white, slightly faded and with contrasting contours, bring to mind Caravaggesque chiaroscuros. The motifs are neither appropriations nor found images, but were conceived like so many theatrical elements, then translated into painting. The great tradition of painting is indeed evoked by the quotation of names of masters such as Poussin and Watteau, in lettering which plays reflexively on the way the image functions as a sign, in the manner of Ed Ruscha. The upper part is occupied by silkscreens of detritus that the artist found on the beach. These expressionist motifs of branches are the only "found" elements in his compositions. He likes to organize the coexistence of materials by also juxtaposing canvas with metal, silkscreen with paint, so that the picture object has its own rhythm, like the rhythms in a poem, which obviously recalls the work of Sigmar Polke, an artist who was particularly fascinated by Picabia.

Both the quality and nature of Salle's pictorial language were in phase with the cultural mood of the 1980s. In the same way, today, the artist uses his collisions of motifs as a way of trying to capture an emotion, a way of liberating his gaze, so as to give the painting complete autonomy, which is the supreme source of emotion for this artist.

If the art of these two painters share this quality of liberating the mind through the clash of image, Salle's work perhaps stands out for the coherence

and rigor of the language it articulates. However, the two masters come together in demonstrating that the image is a matter of perception and that the eye is an instrument of freedom.

David Salle lives and works in New York. He was born in 1952 in Norman (Oklahoma). After studying with John Baldessari at the California Institute of the Arts in the 1970s, the early 1980s saw him become a prominent figure on the new painting scene in New York. Since then, his many international shows have included the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, MUMOK Vienna, the Castello di Rivoli, Turin, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, the Whitney Museum of American Art New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. His paintings are to be found in many important collections, notably the Art Institute of Chicago, the Essl Collection in Vienna and the Guggenheim Museum, New York. A catalogue will accompany the exhibition with a text by Catherine Millet, Editorial Director of *art press*.