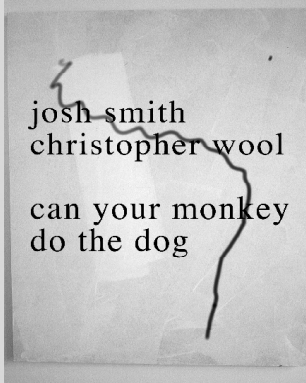

Josh Smith and Christopher Wool
can your monkey do the dog

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*Obligatory mention : © Vera Kotaji pp. Michèle Didier

About *can your monkey do the dog* by Josh Smith and Christopher Wool

can your monkey do the dog is the title chosen for this book conceived jointly by Christopher Wool and Josh Smith. *can your monkey do the dog* is not really a question, as confirmed by the lack of question mark. In this series of pieces created together, what may stand for a monkey for one of these artists can end up «doing the dog» for the other. Of course, there is in reality neither monkey nor dog, just shapes giving rise to other shapes.

Thanks to digital imaging and to graphics editors such as Photoshop, Christopher Wool and Josh Smith create here artworks «for four hands». To start, one of them proposes an image representing a work from his corpus. From this basic picture, the other generates another image by reworking it, by adding and/or removing elements. A third layer is then added by one of the two artists and a new «stratum» superimposed on the previous one... The absence of constraints and lack of mutual censorship regulates the alternating interventions. Only the choice to keep or not to keep the work at the end of the successive alterations is made «by common consent». Once the images have been fully reshaped, they are converted to black and white. Eventually, it becomes impossible for the artists themselves to distinguish precisely who has done what within this pictorial tangle.

Certain characteristic aspects of this special «operation» led by the Wool/Smith tandem could lead us to assume that they are taking us radically away from the art of painting. Neither of these two painters actually paints here, rather, they rework the digital image of an earlier painting or silkscreen with the help of a graphics tablet. In other words, the artwork's support is no longer canvas or a wood or aluminium panel, etc. It is now the representation of the artwork itself. This leads to the thought that, as we move further away from painting, we get closer to its very concept and that getting closer to the idea of a painting means getting closer to its (the idea of its) mode of reproduction.

Surprisingly, the surface relief created by painting becomes even more discernible once it has been captured in the shading system of the reproductive image. No matter that the brush stroke is now no more than a conceptualized vestige, it has never been more visible. It is a kind of landscape, where the motifs of each of the two artists have been replaced by the circumvolutions and the textures inherent in the pictorial matter itself.

Resorting to the use of a dematerialized computer tool and its cold, mechanical, random, dehumanized lines signifies a denial of painting. It nevertheless makes it possible for the viewer's eye to guess at the genesis of the work, carried out in several steps, and in this way rehabilitates the creative gesture. It is, in fact, a peculiar gesture which erases as much as it adds, destroys as much as it rebuilds, a gesture whose main driver is repentance.

Another paradox is seen in the extreme conceptual complexity which defines this work but which finds its *modus operandi* in the nimble spontaneity of unpremeditated interventions and in the chaotic accumulation of layers.

While painting is, once again, shaken to its very foundations, certain phenomena, such as filiation, school, and «atelier» remain surprisingly persistent in the world of art. This work belongs as much to Josh Smith as to Christopher Wool and it crowns and closes many years of collaboration between the two artists. With this difference: that this last cooperation has ended up a purely common work. Since the work was done jointly, the question of attribution is no longer relevant. It is as if Rubens and Van Dyck had found a moment in History to be «masters» at the same time, in the same atelier, and had created works signed with both their names.

can your monkey do the dog represents a significative step in the work of Wool and Smith. Thus, the final conversion of their work to black and white, in addition to providing a feeling of distancing from the pictorial matter, also seems to remind the viewer that this work is decisively linked to the past of the two artists.

Whether the result is the final liquidation of painting or its un hoped-for rephrasing, one is tempted to ask «Does it matter?» since the pragmatic approach taken does not re-appropriate art but rather reappropriates the *artwork*. And to such an extent that it becomes irrelevant whether it one's own or the other's that is re-appropriated.

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Specifications

- 27,90 x 21,50 cm
- 168 pages
- Paper: Gardapat Kiara 135 g
- Cover: laminated coated paper 300 g, sewn in Otabind system

- Printing by Arte-Print, Brussels
- Binding by Hexspoor, Boxtel

Production

- Limited edition of 1000 copies and 300 A.P.

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