

GASPAR WILLMANN

The naked eye?

Falsifications, AI and captcha, a true story.

Gaspar
Willmann

The AI

eye?

In a great rapid movement, a single model of reality is stated on the vertical plane, a digital impression. In a second step, paranoid no doubt, the gaze distinguishes a duplicity, at the moment of the surface. A thin film opens the composition of the image. The now almost distant plane, anachronistic, of the image below is animated by a dry puddle of pigments from above. The collapse of the gullible is brutal. The image is not the impression we thought. It is the pictorial den. The burrowing and ambiguous rat has struck and commits the abduction with a glance, truncated in the flattened pile that the canvas promotes. The visible montage that Gaspar Willmann builds is the crush of iconographic, non-secular rejects, amalgam of an everyday material culture, unnecessary fragments or stereotyped images hollowed out of a particular meaning, and rather the tender gaze

of the recomposed sum of gestures and materials that circulate in the consumed domestic sphere: from the relic replica of the meme to the tangible of a cigarette butt. The mirror image, specular and opens to the verification of the falsification of seeing, the agitated gestures say, "I am not the robot you believe".

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GASPAR WILLMANN I initially do still life to try not to represent something and to be more interested in how the image arrives and it is constituted. Why is it mediated? What is it doing there?

MATHIEU BUARD And reveal the protocol, i.e., the editing of the image.

GW My series called *JUMAP* is a suite of still life. It's a freeze-frame of the image. These paintings represent the immobility in life, it was almost tautological in fact.

MB And by a kind of super-fast, clear and transparent analogy, the still life is between the digital file and the historical subject.

GW The more I go on, the more I tell myself that it's a bit of a failure too. My new series are a bit different. The figure of the rat just arrives in these formats, I don't really know where it's going to lead.

MB Is the rat the living thing? Or is it a subversive figure in the canvas and in space?

GW It is multifunctional, first of all a big rat in slang is called a "Gas-pard". It is a bit of an avatar. And especially that of the artist at work, in his rubble that seeks a context. And then, obviously, all the imagery of the rodent that would emerge in the rubble of a totally destroyed world. It is the continuity of a subject that I treat: the question of waste in the idea of an end of the world, of apocalypse, of a twilight universe in mutation. When I meet the public, I am often asked about artificial intelligence, even though I don't use it specifically.

MB It's strange.

GW Yes, the public think that my paintings are computer generated. However, the construction of the image is totally manual.

MB A clever digital collage?

GW Yes, but in fact all the tools I use to make my collages are crossed by artificial intelligence, from the camera of the iPhone, which almost invents a world when the darkness is too deep, through photoshop, which automates more and more tasks, as the tool "fill from information".

To take on this AI, I turned the trick around, and for these two paintings (hanging on the wall), I used mainstream artificial intelligences, like Dall-e or Midjourney. I type in words like "rat, sunset" and the AI generates an image that I then modify in Photoshop before printing and painting it.

MB This question fascinates the viewer, the generation of the ambiguous image. But here, you do choose the image in the end, don't you?

GW Yes, and I'm really interested in the question of originality. In the context story, I think it's really where and how you show things that's going to matter more than the subject itself. I look for that condition of appearance and decisive moment.

MB This question of artificial intelligence has indeed a meaning in relation to the tools of the image's conception, its role in the production of images in this context. It is also the case when photography appears for painting, which is almost the case, when paper printing or screen printing appears... These are modes of representation that modify your conceptions, but that do not change the protocol of fabrication of the image. The fact that you retouch the painting, that you invest it without speaking of virtuosity or know-how, there is a pictorial subversion.

GW I say more and more that I am a painter by default, painting is the only tool I have found to spend a little more time with images. Instead of staying on my computer for two seconds to make a new file, I have to spend at least a week on it. It's really a different relationship to time and a different experience of image consumption. I relate this to my political position in the world, which is rather a matter of demotion, of taking time.

MB Attention in the strict sense of the term. Indeed, the gesture is not just virtuosity, it is the time brought to things and the concern of an attention.

GW The machine always prints the same frames, they are repetitive and perfect. My painting gesture is wider and wider and more and more visible. I will provoke errors whereas I was very shy at the beginning. Now, there will be spaces of confrontation between the printed image which is frozen, which is controlled on computer and that of the pictorial time of painting. I could make a gesture on the screen, I could control Z at any moment until I reach a perfect gesture, whereas here, the gesture is governed by technical constraints. If it's wrong, it's wrong, and I won't reprint anything. The question of the error, of the badly stretched canvas, of the dust trapped in the oil, and of all the these little material things that are ultra-sensitive and become essential.

MB Which come back to the conditions of painting itself. It's like the famous phrase of Maurice Denis that I find fundamental to understand what painting is, to know that before being a subject, painting is color on a canvas. You can't go back, in relation to what you say about the use of Photoshop.

GW I often speak about the decisive moment in painting, it is missed if one goes further, it is missed if one makes less.

MB And do you find digital transcriptions in your painting?

GW I want people to think that what I did on the computer is done by hand, I don't know if it really works the other way.

MB From the outset, you ask yourself the question of an ambiguity or a versatility in the treatment of the image's constitution.

GW During these last studio open houses at the new Artagon location, I had 200 people a day asking: is this photography or painting? For them, it was either one or the other. It's very satisfying to be able to put something in front of people that they can't grasp. This in-between is very interesting. In a very similar vein, Seth Price talks about capitalist technomancy to point to this advertising environment, which will, for example, model a bottle of whisky in 3D but respond to photographic codes: shadow, light, matter. This moment of transition fascinates me.

MB This number 11 of Temple - made in Japon, is indeed the manufacture of an in-between and also of a subversive exoticism. The look we had for a long time on the elsewhere, this kind of exoticism completely manufactured and inversely lived when the otherness comes from the outside. The stake is indeed a story of gaps and in-betweens since the craft, since the technology, of what would be a culture of transgressions and permutations. Of a link between enchased realities...

GW I came back with a painting file at the Beaux-Arts de Lyon, but I stopped right away. It was in 2016, I came up in this moment when found footage videos was a huge trend, and as a result there was a kind of love-hate relationship to painting. I had a complex too; it was like I had been learning to paint again since I got out of school. I felt like I was rediscovering the medium.

MB It's a detail, no doubt, I see it right now in your paintings, the edges seem to be very different, visible.

GW The edges are super important. It gives a definition to the image. We are not in the pattern, nor in something that could continue somewhere, extend in a reproducible way. It's not an extract of something, it's an image that is constructed and stopped on itself. All the edges are generated by what's inside the canvas, like a thickness. There is this smear effect that materializes this edge, a bit like in watercolor. Some of my small formats give even more the feeling of being an object.

MB What about the issue of litter and waste?

GW There is the question of the rest, as there is no representation and no human figure. The bias was to say what we produce and what we leave as waste. We should be able to learn a lot more about ourselves, via the traces we leave behind with our waste.

MB Remnants of yourself.

GW The waste is also my photos of everyday life. So, these are banal remains of meals and parties... images made and amalgamated. All these images are mixed, from the home-made register to the one of the image found on the Internet, copy-paste, memes, cheap file recovered.... And generally, it's also already .png files that I find on Google Images, which are more commercial images, mercantile, but which are still scraps.

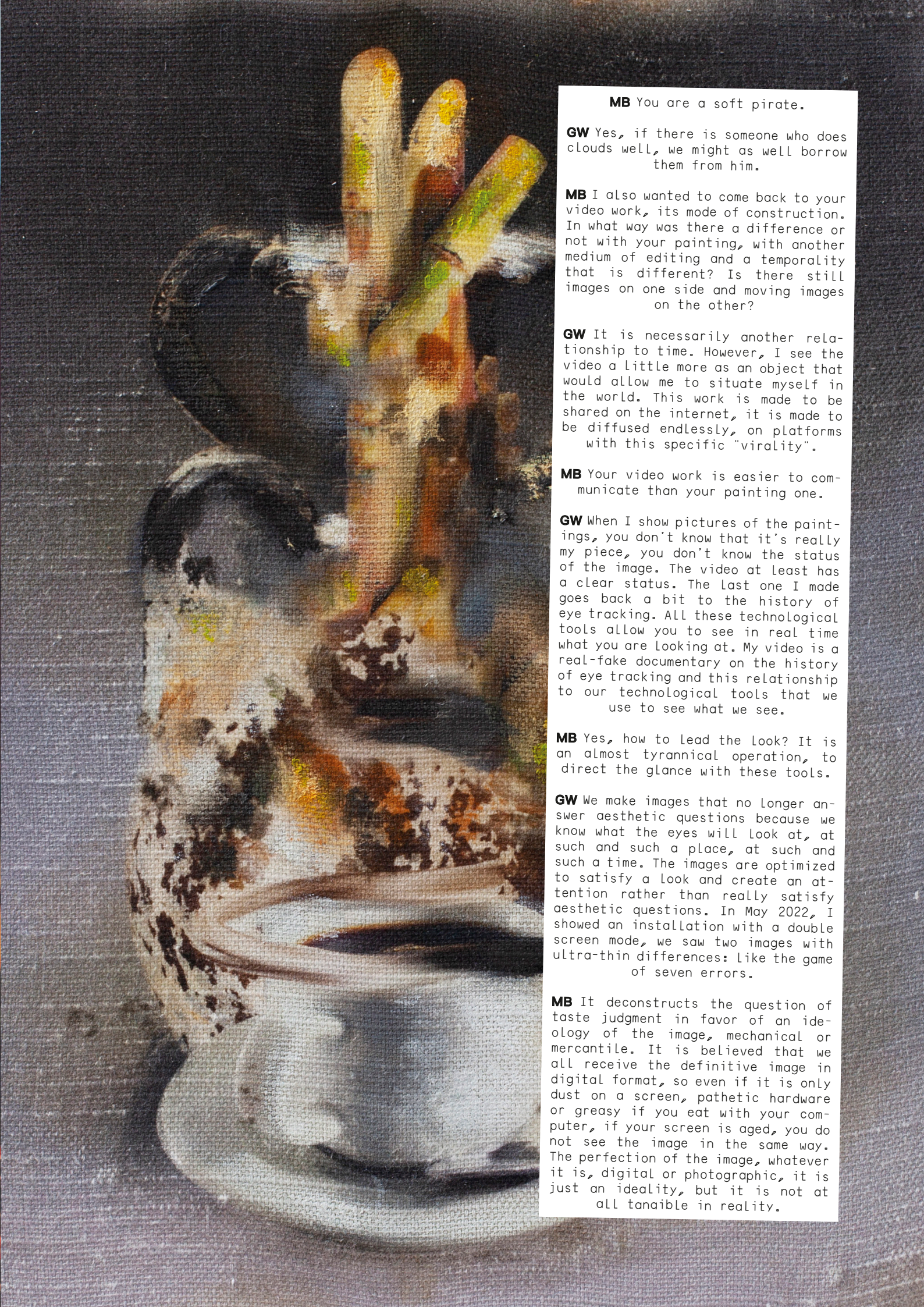
MB Potential rejects that circulate without value in fact.

GW The goal of the game is to find a balance between these registers, and to liquefy the whole thing a little so that we no longer know the origin of the image.

MB Indeed, from the register of everyday domestic objects and scrap things. What is not in your work, I think, is the iconographic representation which is called cultural or serious?

GW It happened to me for the backgrounds to take pieces of Caspar David Friedrich, just a small square of his clouds, and I regenerate them, so that there is only 10% of the 90% present in his painting.





MB You are a soft pirate.

GW Yes, if there is someone who does clouds well, we might as well borrow them from him.

MB I also wanted to come back to your video work, its mode of construction. In what way was there a difference or not with your painting, with another medium of editing and a temporality that is different? Is there still images on one side and moving images on the other?

GW It is necessarily another relationship to time. However, I see the video a little more as an object that would allow me to situate myself in the world. This work is made to be shared on the internet, it is made to be diffused endlessly, on platforms with this specific "virality".

MB Your video work is easier to communicate than your painting one.

GW When I show pictures of the paintings, you don't know that it's really my piece, you don't know the status of the image. The video at least has a clear status. The last one I made goes back a bit to the history of eye tracking. All these technological tools allow you to see in real time what you are looking at. My video is a real-fake documentary on the history of eye tracking and this relationship to our technological tools that we use to see what we see.

MB Yes, how to lead the look? It is an almost tyrannical operation, to direct the glance with these tools.

GW We make images that no longer answer aesthetic questions because we know what the eyes will look at, at such and such a place, at such and such a time. The images are optimized to satisfy a look and create an attention rather than really satisfy aesthetic questions. In May 2022, I showed an installation with a double screen mode, we saw two images with ultra-thin differences: like the game of seven errors.

MB It deconstructs the question of taste judgment in favor of an ideology of the image, mechanical or mercantile. It is believed that we all receive the definitive image in digital format, so even if it is only dust on a screen, pathetic hardware or greasy if you eat with your computer, if your screen is aged, you do not see the image in the same way. The perfection of the image, whatever it is, digital or photographic, it is just an ideality, but it is not at all tanaible in reality.