

Yamada, Discoverer and Inventor

The more I advance in life the more I wonder about its sense in comparison to the sense some artists, some poets have given theirs. Sometimes I confound myself - in empathy - with these artists, these poets. It is evident for me, in any case, that they can answer some questions that I ask myself and usually more clearly than I could do. I best recognize myself through them, and because of that I have sometimes authorized myself, after having listened to them, to speak in their place, in any case by their side.

From the very beginning the artist takes a risk : of losing himself, of losing everything. Is it a question of vocation or of destiny? Of individual deliberate choice or of anticipated acceptance of the consequences of any exercise of liberty? Or all this together? Because, after all, nobody forced them to follow this adventurous path one opens by creating something ascribable to intelligence as much as to intuition and know-how. They could have chosen another one: that of an engineer or of a scientist, for example, or other activities traced more surely in the *socius* and, above all, less aleatory.

Jorge Luis Borges stated, in the beginning of his *Atlas*: " There's no man who is not a discoverer. We start by discovering the bitter, the salted, the concave, the smooth, the rough, the six colours of the rainbow and the twenty-six letters of the alphabet; then we pass on to faces and stars; we finish by doubt or faith and the almost total certainty of our proper ignorance". Painters, sculptors are "discoverers", in this sense, more conscious than most other men: they touch, they look, they think more intensely, exploring the psycho-sensible field they have chosen to surround themselves with: that was true of Van Gogh and of Gauguin, of Picasso and of Giacometti, like of all those who, nomadic by temper, have travelled and then settled down in other countries that were not theirs. That is Yamada's case. Born in Gifu in 1949, in "deepest Japan", he is one of those artists who dove into the unknown, settling down in Paris in 1973 without even speaking French: he registered as a student at the Paris School of Fine Arts, where his professor, Cesar, let him absolutely free to do everything he wanted. Now he speaks and writes in French and has many friends among the international artistic community of Paris. He exhibited his works in Paris, Geneva, Amsterdam, Rouen, Cologne, etc, but also in Japan. He has written numerous little texts, in general rather short, in which he exposed his ideas and his intentions: in metaphorical, essentially poetical and interrogative form:

He thus writes for example : "Now, through my night, I have the desire to perforate a dark sky, one little hole after another, to find the light before the beginning of the day. How?" (*Trou blanc - White Hole*, 2001). Or, even more mysteriously: "Sometimes, the abandoned things talk to me. These things become materials of my sculpture and meet the persons who live inside of me. Sometimes, on the contrary, these beings provoke the abandoned things. That is how my works come to being. Am I the guide between the things and the persons? (...) Will a day come when men will live in the landscape without me?"

Therefore Yamada works, consciously, in the space that separates life from death, maybe with a view to being born again for the world and for himself. One of his sculptures represents a foetus that he has photographed in a corn field near his own child. A number of his works evoke re-appearance, birth and death. - Permanent impermanence, that is quite japanese, isn't it? Or fidelity to the spirit of yin and yang? Few artists are as conscious of being funambulists on a rope between two extremities, and of the mental risk they are taking towards society - the whole society. Both "behind" and "in advance" of his time, he obeys to what Nietzsche called the "Eternal return".

Eternal return of the identical, eternal return of the different, cycles of decadence and of ascendancy,

of ancient and of modern, of the tragical and of the comical, of success and of misfortune, of singing and of silence... eternal return of being and of nothingness, of too-human human and the superhuman, a new "centre of gravity", that is, according to Nietzsche himself, the only possibility of rescue from nihilism. All you need, indeed, for Yamada's oeuvre to become totally clear is to consider it as a eulogy of immanence, divested of any temptation of transcendancy. He has managed to totally escape any form of domination of Christianity or of Shintoism.

His first sculptures are Heads placed on the ground: they have a Pharaonic profile - not Asiatic, in any case. Made out of plaster first, and then in resin, they make one think of heads of soldiers, dead or alive, but it is illusion. Yamada doesn't have any nostalgia for the war: born too late for it, there was no way he might have participated. They are anonymous - calm and even serene. Just simple men - neither heroes nor victims: men like you and me, insofar as we recognize ourselves as such, in the innocence of our future, everywhere, on this planet.

When he arrived in Paris, he walked around here and there and doubtlessly became very quickly fascinated by posters. Not because of their political or commercial contents, not because of their letters and their figures, but as a material, since he tore them into tiny pieces, which he accumulated in his studio until there were thick piles of them. He used them to carefully compose his very own figures having nothing in common with the lacerated posters of Hains, Villeglé, Rotella etc. He created veritable paper mosaics composing a sort of personal mythology which, again, has nothing religious, nothing political, nothing Japanese either. They are visions, arisen ex nihilo, always splendidly invented. Figures, landscapes that have no model, except the photographs accompanying them sometimes. This work in paper, that continued during seventeen years, was created thanks to an artisanal technique also invented thanks to the extraordinary dexterity of his hands. They dazzled me by their beauty when I saw them exhibited in the Claude Samuel Gallery, then on the walls of his studio. A pure rise, always renewed, dreams made true in spite of everything, beyond everything like a legend, the free legend of Yamada that lasted until 2000.

There is the sign of a great audacity in all this, and a perfect independence of spirit. Imitating nobody, Yamada doesn't even imitate himself. He thinks, ponders, acts totally alone, as if the empty space was his natural element and his sole support: the central emptiness. But Yamada has never abandoned sculpture: he has renewed it. In 2003, for example he exhibited a peculiar iron and glass cage he called *Lune-Soleil-Terre* which contained an acrylic painting of two figures leaning over a huge face whose eyes are suggested by circles, the nose by a triangle and whose open mouth with bared teeth suggests a rather baleful lunar crescent. Strange work, sculpture-picture difficult to interpret: death and life oppose each other, like the moon and the sun, but without contradicting each other, at the same time tragic and absurd. The exhibition was called ... *et mes désirs* : what desires did he mean? He didn't say it. This movable, enigmatic sculpture was part of a set of paintings under glass and scrapings on mirrors, where figures are presented side by side in a window frame, or heads in a painting on crossbars, like ex-voto on the walls of a deconsecrated chapel.

Foreboding of an announced death? His mother's? In a text called *Merci* Yamada writes : On January 3, 2005, you finally arrived at destination.

You were walking on four-leggedly in the corridor, like a quadruped, towards a railroad station, still unknown three years ago.

The last time I had seen you was a year ago. It seemed to me, then, that you continued this endless travel in a sleeping car. I ask myself if it was the drunken train that lulled you or if you had simply forgotten to get off at the station.

A long time ago, you had taught me how to walk. Today, you also teach me how to rest. Thank you. Henceforth, we will continue our way from that station called departure."

These sculptures representing his four-footed mother - she has indeed arrived one day at their meeting in that surprising manner - are therefore autobiographical. Contrary to these sculptures, his most recent works bring to mind the famous *Diver* of Paestum, such as he is painted above a coffin: dead and alive at the same time. Yamada made a long, slim sculpture of him, precipitating himself into the empty space of his studio, sculpture-paintings in metal, sculpture in iron and leather that he photographed perched on a rock at the seashore. They sum up the adventurous itineraries of a great and pure artist whose perpetual obsessive insistent dream oscillates from zenith to nadir.

In a painting of 1983, Yamada had already summed up this desire for universal readiness by representing the *Plongeur* of Paestum precipitating himself into the famous *Vague* by Hokusai.

He is the *Diver (Plongeur)*. *The Wave (Vague)* represents the others, the surge and the pressing of all the others. Paradigm of another possible civilization in which the far-eastern culture and the western culture would be ideally reconciled : the dream I have endeavoured all along my own life to make come true. Will I succeed as well as he did?

It is therefore necessary to tell Thanks to the discoverer and nomadic inventor Yamada. He will help others to recognize themselves as being several different persons within the same body, bearers of long interlaced traditions, known and unknown to themselves.

Alain Jouffroy, 2008