



The Miracle of Execution

Pastel and Watercolor in the Work of Sam Szafran

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If there is anything at the core of Sam Szafran's works that could be held responsible for their impact, then surely it is their latent mystery. These works take us to the limit of the definable and controllable: they are inscrutable, not just in terms of their willful, puzzling or disconcerting motifs – the unfathomable spaces of staircases, the impenetrability of jungle-like greenhouses, or the views of lithography presses and stones in the studio. Borrowed from the realm of the everyday and of the artist's direct experience, the familiar, which belongs to real life, is merely an excuse to render what lies behind the supposed reality of appearances – as Georges Perec writes, "to view the world at an angle and not to look at the center of a thing, but past it laterally, so that everything is askew. Only then does the world reveal itself with great clarity."¹

Discovering the underlying secret of the works is a delayed process, which the artist seems to deliberately bring about. For only if the pictures are approached patiently can something of the technical virtuosity be sensed with which, by means of scintillating layers, he seduces the eye into presuming something ineffable beneath the surfaces.

Yet with his views of studios, stairwells and proliferating vegetation, which he has repeated, varied and inflected over many years, the artist also gives us a thematic pointer to the essence of his art. Our attention is drawn to the execution of the works by their color range, the whole spectrum of pastel chalks, comprising infinite gradations and dividing the light into multitudinous refractions.

It would be a hopeless undertaking to try to get a hold on the secret recipes used for the opaque, dull and brilliant surfaces in Szafran's pictures or for those planes that disclose the microstructure of the color spaces. And yet one inevitably aspires to understand the incredible impact of the technique and to resolve the enigma of the pictorial image, which is two-dimensional only at first sight. One could speak here of a duplication of seeing. The iconographic "sense" of the pictures, the constancy of the chosen themes, seems almost to be thwarted by the materials used. The depiction of enclosed spaces, which is peculiar to these pictures, underscores their surfaces. It is here that the broadening of the horizon takes place. A precise study uncovers a panopticon of internal structures and endlessly repeated, one could almost say organic, modules which we come upon in the chalk literally everywhere we look.

Sam Szafran leaves little to chance in his pictures. The openness of the visual experience is produced by the meticulously prepared and accurately calculated structures which the artist introduces into his works. This is also the reason for the constancy of the "superficial" themes of his pictures.

The chosen technique itself, adapted in the laboratory over long years of experience using pastels either alone or in combination with charcoal or watercolor, makes reference to the history of a medium. The aesthetic discourse of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries may help us to grasp more precisely the process and impact of Szafran's imagery.

Sam Szafran,
Lillette on a bench, 2007,
watercolor and pastel on
tracing paper, 81 x 73 cm,
Private collection

Experience and Experiment – Sam Szafran and the history of the pastel

“We should only expect of a pastel what it is capable of giving,” Karl Robert demanded in his *Traité du pastel*, published in 1896; “its true strength can be summarized in two words: freshness and grace.”² The fleeting, ephemeral aspect of the pigment powder that adheres loosely to the picture support and is capable, like no other tool in art, of producing subtle, fine color nuances, is also the reason why the technique was

Fig. 1,2: Color chart, Pastels Roché, Paris, 1938



long regarded as inferior to oil painting; it is less stable and too sensitive, extremely susceptible to dampness and jolting movements, and had to be immediately framed under glass. The invention of acid-free paper in the 20th century was a veritable blessing for this fragile technique, which was long considered impossible to conserve. For example, the *Encyclopedist* Denis Diderot made fun of the painter Quentin de La Tour when the latter presented his portrait of the Marquise de Pompadour, now in the Louvre, at the Salon: “Remember, Pastellist, thou art but dust and to dust thou shalt return.”³ In the same vein, the Symbolists experienced the pastel as a revelation, as an ideal and altogether sensitive means of expressing the inexpressible, of merely suggesting the indeterminate, the unutterable, or, to use the words of Jean Moréas, “of cladding an idea in a sensuous form.”⁴

The word pastel is etymologically derived from the Italian “pastello”, “pasta”. The pastel process involves pigments that have been ground and then mixed with plaster or clay and a binder to form a

paste, a kind of modelling clay from which suitable chalk-like sticks can be formed. In his *Encyclopædia* Denis Diderot described the pastel technique simply as “painting... in which the sticks take on the task of the brush”.⁵ Leonardo da Vinci, in the *Codex Atlanticus* (fol. 247, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan) describes a technique of “dry coloring” which he had seen being used in France by Jean Perréal (Jean de Paris) before 1500. Leonardo himself used pastel chalks very sparingly, mostly to highlight his drawings, as for example in the famous portrait of 1499 in the Louvre, presumably of Isabella d’Este, Duchess of Mantua. This portrait is done in black chalk and red ocher, and only the highlights are in yellow ocher pastel.

The pastel reached its zenith in 18th-century France. Portrait painters in particular recognized the qualities of the fine color powder, with whose nuances, in infinite gradations, they could render the peach shades of the skin or the splendor of silk better than with oils. As a technique, pastel may not have been as highly acknowledged as oil painting because it was mainly suitable for smaller to medium-size portraits. However thanks to artists such as Rosalba Carriera, Quentin de La Tour, Jean-Marc Nattier, Jean-Etienne Liotard and others, it attained a popularity and inspired collectors more than ever before, something which may possibly also be attributed to the societal and socio-cultural context of that era: “The pastel was the intrinsic expression of an epoch in which the false and the true, the deep and the superficial were almost indistinguishable.”⁶

Above all, the eloquence of the medium seemed suitable for giving psychological expression to the human face in portraiture, something which artists and critics alike indulged in, almost to the point of physiognomic scholarship.

In the course of this development, pastel advanced to become an autonomous, independent technique, as can be deduced, at the latest, from the much-respected *Grammaire des arts du dessin* by Charles Blanc, 1880, where we read: “But the pastel is not just an auxiliary device. Some painters have achieved great excellence in this technique, La Tour, Chardin, Tocqué, Prud’hon himself [sic!], the Venetian Rosalba and Madame Vigée Lebrun have gained it a great status and made admirable use of it in portraiture.”⁷

For the artists of Romanticism, first and foremost Eugène Delacroix, the pastel in the 19th century ultimately represented a medium of artistic innovation, given the color-nuance possibilities presented by the neutralization or intensification of the shades used. Within a few years, in the mid-1840s, several treatises on the pastel were published in which the authors remarked that the technique was “very fashionable”.⁸ And as early as the mid-1830s, the Salon granted pastels along with watercolors a whole room, drawing attention especially to the portraitists.⁹ It was in nineteenth century landscape painting, however, that the innovation pastel represented was brought to fruition. Boudin made the plein air an autonomous genre. Finally, Millet furnished proof that pastel was also suitable for representing real life. Mention will be made later of the late Degas’ virtuoso mastery of the technique. No longer was pastel regarded as an “*art de boudoir*”; it was a technique used by avant-garde artists.

The medium owes its attainment of such a noble status particularly to its capacity to achieve an impact that is in no way inferior to oil painting, at least when viewed from a certain distance. Seen up close, the pastel reveals its distinctiveness: its essential capacity is to merely intimate, never to insist.

The viewer of Sam Szafran’s series from the early 1970s, *Atelier, rue de Crussol*, the *Ateliers Bellini* or the staircases, obtains a very different impression of pastel. The studios, like the staircases and the other motifs preferred by the artist, admit us into his immediate surroundings: “I seized my theme”, Szafran explains, “like a rascal monopolizes a neighborhood. In doing so, I started with what I knew: the city, the street, the stairs.”¹⁰

The series *L’atelier, rue de Crussol*, and the *Imprimeries* and *Ateliers Bellini*, a printing shop for art lithographs in rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis which the artist ran for several years in the early 1970s and

where he also had a studio, refer to his immediate surroundings. The choice of the studio, a classical motif in art history, reflects the artist's status, shows his place of work. Yet Sam Szafran is not just concerned with the established topos. He is intensely preoccupied with a technical problem, the mastery of pastel, which is of vital importance to him.

The Studio as Laboratory

Disarray would seem to prevail in the eleven pastels which the artist did between 1968 and 1972 entitled *L'Atelier, rue de Crussol*. From February to October 1968, Szafran used this former studio of American artist Irving Petlin in the 11th arrondissement, not far from the Cirque d'Hiver. Between tables consisting of trestles and boards covered in open or heaped-up books, are several easels, with and without paintings on them. In the middle of the studio is a cast-iron stove, the only immobile object in this place of diligent activity, of relentless experimentation. The outside, real world does not intrude here; it plays an equally minor role in the rest of Szafran's self-referential oeuvre.

In one sheet in the series (cat. 23) the artist is sitting in a chair with his elbow on the armrest, pondering, lost to the world, his gaze directed across the full table into emptiness. Projecting into the room above his head is a large metal tub attached to one of the metal crossbeams, a homage to Degas' *Tub* which crops up in other compositions, sometimes in reverse. The easel at the left of the picture is empty, but the numerous boxes of pastels on the right point to the technique used by Szafran. This keyboard of painted pastel sticks testifies to the seemingly infinite variety of colors and the barely discernible nuances between them. One almost thinks one can hear their colorful notes, their crescendi and decrescendi. The countless sheets of crumpled paper on the floor are manifestations of this site of experimental exploration. Entering Szafran's studio is like entering a laboratory, the *hortus conclusus* of a chemist of colors, for whom experimenting with art materials represents an existential challenge. As Szafran himself once explained, "The various states, orderly and disorderly, of this studio, shown in the eleven variations it inspired – the general tone, daylight or glow of night, ordered or ragged compositions – reflect the range of intense emotions I was feeling at the time, from relative stability, if not serenity, to anger and the most acute, dramatic passion."¹¹

However much the motifs resemble one another, their composition differs in coloration and mood. Some appear matte, their colors reserved (cat. 25). Despite the use of the complementary shades of blue (wall) and brownish-orange for the wood of the tables, a color *éclat* fails to take place, as if the color energies stored in the chalks were waiting, between the complementary poles, to explode. Another sheet in the series (fig.3, cat. 24) makes an altogether different impact. Not only does the disorder seem to be under control here: The boxes of pastels are arranged on the wooden tabletops in orderly parallel rows; easels and canvases are stacked in rank and file at the side; the floor has been swept. On the artist's chair is an item of clothing, and perhaps a blanket. The large tub is still suspended in space and has been joined by a chair. Is this attached to the steel struts of the ceiling or hovering in space? The cast-iron stove is no longer the vanishing point of this composition. An unusual scenario emerges above it. On a wire stretched diagonally across the studio, an equilibrist is balancing on his back with the help of a pole, one leg bent, the other stretched downwards. Behind him in the back of the room we can make out the artist, seen from the side, sitting at a table drawing his model. The equilibrist is a reference to his own work. Shortly after Szafran married Lilette Keller in 1964, he got to know the equilibrist Philippe Petit, who became world famous in 1970 for his spectacular high-wire act between the two towers of Notre-Dame de Paris (fig.4). Petit rehearsed for that performance in Szafran's studio, where the artist drew him in 1968 (fig.5). Yet the equilibrist is not the theme of the picture. Viewers only



Fig. Sam Szafran,
*The Studio, rue de Crussol
 with funambulist and Pastel
 Boxes*, February 1972,
 Pastel, 117,5 x 78 cm,
 Private collection

discover him when they have visually found their way into the composition. The mesmerizing effect is due to the colors of the pastel chalks and the “A la Gerbe” nuances, their lustre, the brilliance of which is such that it is reflected in the light of steel girders of the glass roof and stands out from the blue walls.

The minutiae of the depiction and the almost collage-like execution, in a complex technique that eschews anything spontaneous, in no way suggest pastels as a medium. One would expect a less ame-



Fig. 4: Philippe Petit walking a tightrope between the towers of Notre-Dame, Paris, 1970, Photo: J. Pavlovsky-Rapho

nable, more precise instrument, more suited to sharp line and clear drawing. After all, the distinctiveness of the pastel is that it is both “line and color,”¹² that the draughtsman works with color and the painter with the chalk sticks. Pastel turns line into the color support and color into line; *disegno* and *colore* enter into a symbiosis.

A Question of the Aggregate State

The contradiction between motif and technique is even more graphic in the very technical drawings of the *Imprimerie Bellini*. These were done in a lithograph workshop which Szafran took over in the early 1970s and named after the Italian painter. Together with a friend, Szafran rented an old film-poster printing shop on rue du Faubourg Saint-Denis and bought old presses. Here he produced lithographs and engravings for artists, including the members of the Panique group. The artist always regarded the workshop architecture, the presses, printing plates and rollers in the lithograph printing shop as self-sufficient themes for pictures. He repeatedly focussed on the glass roof of the studio from different points of view, and depicted the cogwheels of the printing presses, conveyor belts, screws, plates and tools with great precision and in great detail. This surgically analytical exactitude of the depiction starkly contrasts with the ephemeral, powdery, demanding nature of the material, to the tradition of the pastel as handed down in art history. If one calls to mind the great eighteenth-century masters, who played with the transparency of gentle color nuances in their pastel portraits and applied darker colors over brighter ones to

create an impression of authenticity and naturalness, then it is clear that Szafran's handling of pastel is opposed to this supposedly more appropriate use of the medium.

The fundamental issue here is that of the aggregate state into which the initial material is put in the artworks. Szafran often fixes each layer in his pastels. when fixed in this way, the color particles intermingle in a different manner. They become saturated and collapse to form a smoother layer, depending on how long the fixative is permitted to act on them. As a result, the visual impact is fundamentally changed. The color layer becomes darker and loses something of its bright, airy character. Instead of surface light, depth of light comes into play. Technically speaking, the pastel here consists of several compact color layers separated by the fixatives. The resulting effect gives the objects – chairs, armchairs,

tubs, tables, machines, plates – more material consistency. The aim of translating the immaterial color powder into a material form is an intrinsic contradiction. The Lebanese poet and friend of Szafran's, Fouad El-Etr, writes that the artist "sought this concentration of sensations, feelings and impressions."¹³ It is as if he wanted to direct his gaze behind, almost into, the things, as if he were trying to penetrate their physicality with his eyes.

Obsession with the Material

There is a correspondence between this obsession with the art material and its omnipresence in the artworks. This is particularly evident in the series of pastels entitled *Escalier Bellini* (cat. 26–27). The narrow dark winding staircase opens on a view of orderly boxes of pastels at the bottom of the steps. The changing, oblique views of the stairwells repeatedly provide a view of brilliantly colored pastel chalks. Here again they seem to be the actual theme, the centre of gravity for exploratory views of winding staircases. The black that dominates the pictorial composition here – reminiscent of dark cosmic spaces, defined on the color scale as infinite zero point – seems like the place where the ignition, even explosion and unfolding of the light-infused polychromatism might occur. From out of this (painted) immateriality, things emerge into being with the help of the light-containing particles of the pastel. To a certain degree, one could deduce from the metaphysical impact of such pictures a kind of surreality which adheres to things. In this way, a further dimension is added to our appreciation of these things, offering us a view beneath the surface.

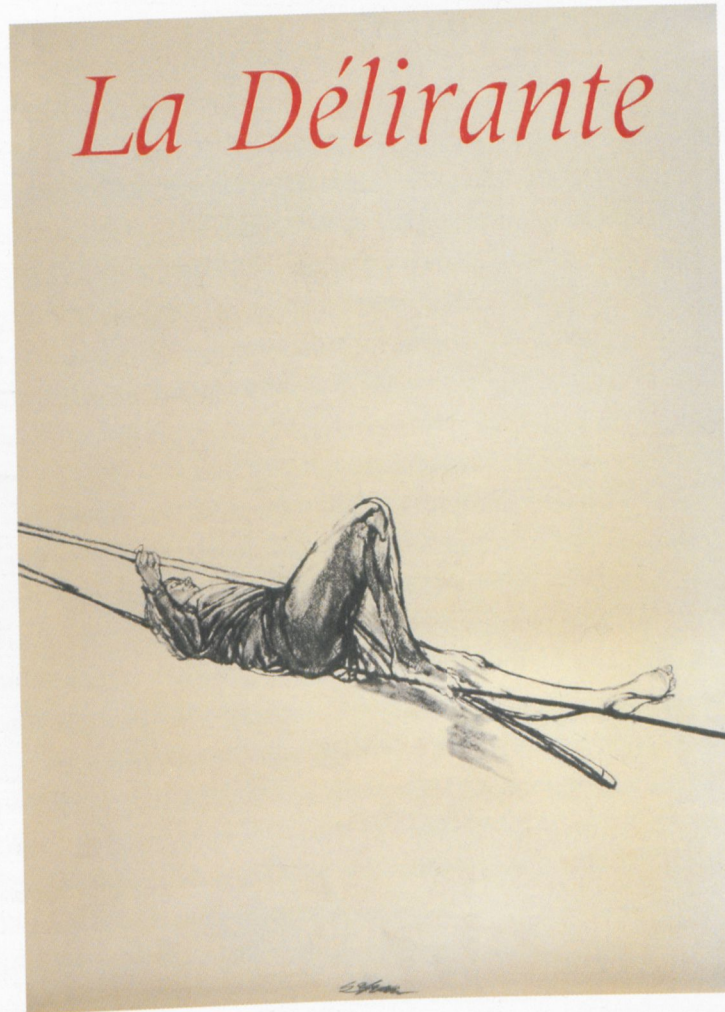


Fig. 5: Cover of the review *La Délirante* with the Sam Szafran charcoal drawing *Funambulist* (1968)

Beginnings and First Pastels

Sam Szafran was introduced to and encouraged to test pastel chalks by Henri Goetz (1909-1989), a painter who was one of the few in his generation to use this outmoded technique. Szafran likes to talk about how his friends Jean-Paul Riopelle, Joan Mitchell and others initially made fun of his first attempts in this “*bou-doir*” technique. Szafran studied under Goetz at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière.¹⁴ Goetz had a free studio there, more by chance, as Szafran recalls, but sometimes he also let him come to his private studio in rue Notre Dame.¹⁵ Szafran emphasizes that wanting to learn this craft at the pinnacle of abstraction was almost impossible: “There was no master who could teach us the craft. We no longer know how people did pastels in the past. Liotard’s treatise on the pastel is scarcely comprehensible for us today... We know nothing any more.”¹⁶

But as a self-taught artist, Sam Szafran immediately set about independently exploring the newly-discovered medium: “I have never been able to suffer the idea of a teacher,” he says, recalling his beginnings as an artist, which he experienced as “complete confusion”. When he returned to Paris in the early 1950s from Australia, that other end of the earth to which he had emigrated with his mother and his sister in 1947, Szafran discovered Montparnasse quarter. There artists and writers met in the cafés, and Szafran is in a unique position to be able to talk about them today. They included, among others, Alexander Calder, Henry Miller, Nicolas de Staël, Jean Ipousteguy, and finally Jean Arp and Yves Klein, for whom he did various errands. The encounter with Alberto Giacometti, which will be dealt with at a later point, was pivotal for him. At first it was difficult to impose some kind of order on the influences around him: “At the age of

twenty I had to process everything at once... Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Tachism, the Americans ... what a muddle!”¹⁷ Thanks to his curiosity and thirst for knowledge, in the German bookshop Calligramme on rue du Dragon he discovered the German Old Masters and the Romantic and Expressionist artists, the Viennese School, Klimt and the artists of the Secession, as well as Belgian and Czech Symbolism. He consolidated his craft, among other things, by attending *cours d’artisanat* provided by the City of Paris.

Initially, charcoal drawing was the technique most practised by the destitute artist. His early preserved drawings, for example *Death* (1958) or *The Tortured Soul* (1958), contain obvious Symbolist influences. Some of these sheets have white chalk highlights. Prior to that he had also done abstract compositions, collages of wood, scraps of paper, bits of admission tickets and other materials of no value which the artist applied layer by layer to these collages (fig.6). In some cases he worked his collages with a flame so as to condense, concentrate or compress the material. Szafran claims that Kurt Schwitters inspired these collages. He had got to know Schwitters’ work through Raymond Hains. Basically, the processual aspect, this layering procedure, is very much related to his later handling of pastel chalks, layers of which are individually superimposed and fixed, as mentioned above. It was Jean Clair who pointed this out:

“The first collages show, very much in the style of Schwitters, how by instinct the artist already sees the work more like a tray on which he distributes the ma-

terials, rather than a canvas to which he applies them. The painting bears more resemblance to slag, accretion, is more accumulation than painting.”¹⁸

Around 1958-59 Szafran decided to abandon abstract material collages: “I realized that reality is stronger than anything else.” On the occasion of one of his first exhibitions, at Galerie Jacques Kerchache in Paris in 1965, Pierre Schneider wrote: “To me the work of Sam Szafran seems both isolated and essential. In it the



Fig. 6: Sam Szafran, *Untitled*, 1958, collage on cardboard. Private collection

real rises up, still pale as death, caught up in fetters, dragging with it the odor of the beyond... Painting, with Szafran, has made a miraculous recovery."¹⁹

Ostensible Figuration and the Abstract in the Concrete

Szafran did not opt for the purely figurative. His figuration is ostensible and as such may be compared with that of painters like Balthus or Francis Bacon. Abstraction is applied to the concrete, to the depiction of the apparently figurative, equipped with a macrostructure that hovers between the abstract and the physical, as a glance at the series of rhinoceroses painted in oil on canvas between 1959 and 1961 illustrates (fig.8). The inspiration for this series was provided by Albrecht Dürer's woodcut of 1515, a reproduction of which he had discovered at the shop of the dealer Paul Proute on rue de Seine. Szafran's rhinoceroses, however, are studies of light and planes in which light plays the main role, reflecting from heads, backs, muscles, etc., irrespective of any physical laws. Subtle color nuances, underscoring the effects of light and shade, tend not so much to dissolve the shapes as to enable color to articulate form.

Shortly afterwards, the artist executed numerous variations on heads of cabbage, a vegetable familiar to him from his childhood. The artist grew up in rue du Faubourg Saint-Martin. From his regular walks to the weekly market with his father, he was as accustomed to the smell of rotting cabbage as the young Malte Laurids Brigge was to the smells perceived daily from the hospital Val de Grâce in Paris, in the story by Rainer Maria Rilke.²⁰ In 1961-62 the nourishing and cheap post-war vegetable became the young artist's study object of preference. Szafran studied the pastel medium by means of heads of cabbage (see p. 180), which "changed, with the sluggishness of a leap year, from one color (and one smell) to another – shades of green became shades of blue; and these shades of blue turned to violet, purple or black; the heads of cabbage turned white when they were in a considerably advanced state of decay. A still-life had never been more worthy of the designation."²¹ Once again, the artist's actual concern emerges clearly: to peel away the superficial figurativeness of things so as to reach the intrinsic, the process underlying their existence. What could be more suitable to this end than the rotting "leaf-layered" vegetable?

Another explanation for the fascination which pastel as an art material had for Szafran is provided by his family history. Over generations, members of his family had earned their living in the fabric trade. The charm of handling chalk powder is self-evident. Szafran's repeated emphasis on the degree to which the very complexity of the pastel material stimulated him is of major importance for understanding his works. His engagement with the material in the picture, that is to say, with dissecting, analyzing and reassembling, makes the visual response to the picture a quasi tactile experience of the objects.

A Lesson from Giacometti

The artist's search, his focus on the aspect of process, his constantly renewed and repeated views of heads of cabbage or other leitmotifs, is driven by a questioning of, and an engagement with, the exploration of reality itself. Szafran says that while attending La Grande Chaumière he had already wanted to study his model not in a pose, but from all sides and in motion.



Fig. 7: Kurt Schwitters, *Mz 410 something or other*, 1922, Collage, cloth, paper and feather on cardboard, Sprengel Museum Hannover



Fig. 8: Sam Szafran,
*Gratitude cast away from
earthly Paradise*,
July 18th 1960, 114 x 146 cm
Private collection

Alberto Giacometti is the artist who showed Szafran how to persevere with one and the same object. The insight he gained by repeatedly exploring that one object so as to reveal its actual being, by fathoming its actual reality, is surely the essence of what Szafran refers to as the “Giacometti lesson”. Giacometti’s striving for an adequate approach to reality, his questioning of everything supposedly real, can be related to the enquiring manner in which Szafran approached the heads of cabbage: “But there is another uncertainty here: Does one try to depict the things one sees, or something emotional? Or a certain feeling for form that one has inside and would like to project outside? ... If one wishes to express oneself, to disregard external reality, one finally produces an object that has a great similarity to external reality. If, by contrast, one tries to copy a head as precisely as possible, for the viewer the result has under certain circumstances absolutely no resemblance to the head depicted...”²² Szafran’s account of the genesis of his heads of cabbage is comparable: line for line he depicted them with his pastel chalks, and when he stepped back to observe his drawing and model, the one suddenly had nothing whatsoever to do with the other.

Was it Giacometti who inspired Szafran to repeatedly tackle a single object, a single motif? The fact is that both artists, in keeping with their temperament, challenge, coerce and controvert their inner resistance: “When something is simple it doesn’t interest me,” Szafran confesses, and describes Giacometti as his real master, although the latter never accepted pupils. The relationship between the artist and his emerging work is passionate; Szafran himself describes it as a “visual delight”. He always

works on several pictures simultaneously. And he always gets bogged down somewhere with them. Sometimes years can pass between the beginning and the completion of a work: "It's the picture that calls me, it's not me who makes it."

Stairs

Stairs are the most frequently recurring motif in Szafran's oeuvre. He always returns to stairs, a motif that bears within it a repeated, necessary movement of ascending and descending. But, as Jean Clair writes: "Szafran's unique work repeats nothing, it continues, insists, returns, seeks, in a process that is both binding and also changing, animated and threatened."²³ His repeated views of stairwells are not to be interpreted from the standpoint of a person arriving or descending or leaving the building (fig. 9). Instead, the winding shaft-like spaces, the often vertiginous flights of stairs, evoke nightmarish situations. They conjure up not so much the movement associated with climbing endless steps as a free fall. This effect not only has to do with the pull which the pictures exert through the handling of light, the alternation of gloomy shadow and subtle lighting which Szafran studied thoroughly with the help of countless Polaroids (see p. 181). It also has to do with the way in which Szafran articulates space, and in so doing avoids the mathematics of architectural representation. This magical chasm with its irresistible pull downwards is dependent on warping space, shattering its familiar three-dimensionality. His curvilinear softening of the familiar straight lines and vanishing points, his distorted framework, appear as if seen through a wide-angle lens.

The staircases and stairwells in Szafran's works seem to lead nowhere. They are actually intermediate spaces and dividers between the private and the public, the inside of the apartment and the street outside. Despite the recurrent mysteriously locked doors, Szafran's stairs stand for themselves, traverse an imaginative space whose function can hardly be to lead to an exit or entrance. These are dead-ends, going nowhere. Yet the stairwells point to something concrete. The first series was done at 54 rue de Seine, the address of his friend, the Lebanese poet Fouad El-Etr, founder and editor of the review *La Délirante* and the publishing house of the same name (cat. 42-46). In contrast to first impressions, these staircases, which initially seem eerily empty, are frequented by numerous, mostly isolated visitors. The gallery-owner and collector Jacques Kerchache, his artist-friends François Barbâtre, Martin Dieterle, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Sam Szafran himself and several other people turn up on these staircases, in these strangely distorted intermediate worlds, somewhere between inside and outside.

The figures concealed in these spaces with their view-obstructing levels are incomplete, indeed cut off, depicted ascending or descending the stairs. Sometimes we see legs, sometimes a torso, then an arm aligned with a handrail whose wood has become shiny over the decades and which snakes its way through the stairwell as a visible line one moment, as an imaginary line the next. It is this element, a line tracing the spatial character of the winding stairs, that evokes our own tactile recollection of such boundaries. It marks the support-providing border between staircase and stairwell and at the same time winds its way vertiginously through the space. This trajectory, abstracted from its object like a condensate, reappears in the series of at times almost calligraphic watercolor drawings done in the early 1990s (fig. 10, cat. 53). The lines, spiralling, then deflected, extending from another viewpoint, then bending in sharp curves, do not denote the beginning and end of a movement, but are instead dynamic vectors describing a sense of space. Here too there is no beginning and no end, as if there were a strong undertow linking things over distances.

In the late 1990s Szafran's masterful handling of perspectives, angles and planes took him from the formal reduction and dissection of their elements to an entirely new type of composition in which



Fig. 9: Sam Szafran
Untitled (Stairs),
 1974, pastel, 78 x 58.5 cm,
 Collection Lilette Szafran,
 Malakoff

stairs, shadows, planes and house facades are brought together into confusing, steeply rising and falling, unstable chasms. The resulting works, watercolors and pastels, are collages that question mere superficial appearances. After all, from what angle would one consider grasping reality in this confusion of perspectives?

At this point it is useful to take a look at the work of Kurt Schwitters. It can be assumed that Szafran did not miss the large Schwitters retrospective exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in winter 1994-95, given that he regards the Hanoverian artist very highly and claims to owe him so much.²⁴ The way Szafran composes his stairs and street canyons recalls Schwitters' material collages, which also determined the principle behind his architectonic implementations in the *Merz* buildings (fig. 11-12). The historical photographs of the 1933 *Merz* building exhibited at the Centre Pompidou show the dissolution and/or duplication of perspectives and possible visual axes. Points of orientation, in the sense of front and back, straight or crooked, no longer seem possible in this mayhem of walls, edges, corners, planes and peaks made of wood and plaster elements. The world, broken open into angles, axes and their individual perspectives, seems to be dissected into the plethora of its possible views. One should not forget that the walls of the first *Merz* building in the studio in Hanover still had "posters and fragments of newspapers stuck all over them and were hung with pictures. ... Into the already packed studio, full of heaps of paper,

rubbish, paintings and sculptures, Kurt Schwitters built a construction out of old wooden laths which he covered with all sorts of apparently random materials."²⁵ He did not paint the walls white, as they appear in the photographs, until the 1930s.

Another important feature which the respective oeuvres of the two artists have in common is their self-referentiality. Just as Schwitters excluded any issues located outside his work and made the world playfully manageable and manipulable for himself in scraps and fragments, Szafran too handles reality by dissecting it. Depicted extracts and views of his world – the roofs and inner courtyards of the houses on Boulevard du Montparnasse, the roofs and stairwells of rue de Seine and Malakoff – are collaged in the different series of works. The painted airmail envelope that is central to the 1999 composition *Paysage à la manière d'Hokusai* (cat. 50) is unique in Szafran's oeuvre and is like a reminiscence of Schwitters.

The Temporality of the Oeuvre

As in the plant pictures, where the space is disguised more than anything else so as to reveal something behind it, here too the figurative, the ostensible motif, is merely a stimulus for a theme that resounds be-



Fig. 10: Sam Szafran, *Untitled (Stairs and handrails)*, 1997-1998, watercolor on silk, 68.5 x 85.3 cm, Private collection, London

yond the figurative. Be it staircases or vegetation in the studio spaces and greenhouses, the views of the already known, familiar and nevertheless strange spaces are always dream-like, similar in their inevitable repetition, yet innovative in detail. The pictures are insistent revenants that refuse to let go of us, that seduce us by means of repeated, always slightly adjusted points of view, directing our attention to that which is always similar but never the same. The question of temporality in Szafran's oeuvre which this raises must take two aspects into account: on the one hand, the constancy of these leitmotifs over whole phases of his life and entailing the recurrence over decades of an object once found; and on the other, the repetition which introduces a second temporal moment that points, by dramatic contrast, to split-second transitoriness. It is no coincidence that the pictures remind us of film, as if their sequence was a variation of the same frame, moving pictures on a screen which the eye or the mind can scarcely keep apart. Szafran himself derives his visual imagination, his pictorial notion of space, from a mode of thinking in moving images. His generation learned seeing from the cinema screen. Georges Perec portrays that generation in *Les Choses*, where he writes of the young heroes Jérôme and Sophie: "Above all, they had the cinema. And this was probably the only area where they had learned everything from their own sensibilities. They owed nothing to models. Their age and education made them members of that first generation for which the cinema was not so much an art as simply a given fact."²⁶

Were he to have worked in cinema, Szafran once said, he would have been an editor, not a director. Yet Szafran's stairs are anything but film-stills that freeze the flow of action and movement. The respective images express themselves in terms of movement, variation and continual change. Time is implicit, as expressed by Edmund Husserl in the term *prolepsis*, a kind of prospective seeing that points to the future through what is found in the present. Each work Szafran begins necessarily demands a subsequent image as its continuation. Here, it is the pastel technique in particular that infiltrates the traces of temporality, be it in the legibility of the working process, or in the blurring of the structures which the



Fig. 11: Sam Szafran,
Untitled, 2004, pastel,
124 x 83 cm
Private collection

layers of the images present for the viewer to discover, and which seem at each further glance to be modified. One automatically thinks of the images as aggregate states of one and the same object, of the matter inherent in the things and which is subject to transformation. Such an effect can only be achieved by means of figuration, by reference to the actual, the more or less familiar object. For how would such short-circuits take place in pure abstraction, and how could they be rendered visible?

Scholarly Art

“I have chosen pastel as a means of expression because it seems to me to be an extremely strict tool with which to grapple with my fantasies.” This is how, in 1970, Szafran acknowledged and described the strong, lifelong impact which the discovery of the chalks had on him.²⁷

The pastel chalks themselves and the works of the great masters of the technique became subjects of long-term study. Szafran engaged in those studies without presuppositions, almost scientifically. He studied the treatises by Liotard and the *Traité du Pastel* by Karl Robert in libraries, trained his eye in front of works in collections and museums, and had pastels by Old Masters shown to him in the Cabinet des Dessins at the Louvre.²⁸ There he tried to copy drawings by Watteau “with three crayons”: sanguine, pierre noire, craie blanche (red, black, white). With regard to Szafran, one is reminded of what Paul Valéry wrote about Edgar Degas in 1938: “Art – by which he meant problems involving

a certain mathematics more subtle than the usual and which no one so far has been able to formulate, indeed whose existence can only be known to very few. He liked to use the term ‘scholarly art’; he used to say that a painting was the result of a series of arithmetical operations ...”²⁹ This description could also apply to Szafran’s ingenious approach. Finally, there is Denis Rouart’s study *Degas à la recherche de sa technique*, first published in 1945, which was given to Szafran as a present in 1968 and of which he said that his pastels owed most to it.³⁰

Edgar Degas is regarded as the virtuoso of the pastel in the 19th century, although in his handling of the medium even he ranks at the end of a series of artists prone to free experiment, as shown in the 2008 exhibition at the Musée d’Orsay, which also included two works by Sam Szafran.³¹ We know that Jean-François Millet, for example, was already astonishingly free in his use of the technique. Rather than using pastels first and foremost, he added the colors later to his black charcoal drawings. This *trait noir* (black line) is very characteristic of his pastels, which he basically handled like color pencils, and therefore did not use the rough paper, *papier pumicif*, considered particularly suitable for pastels.³² Edouard Manet for his part applied his pastels directly to the stretched white canvas, and only very rarely to paper, without preliminary drawings. Pastel seemed to him to be particularly suitable due to its simple use, requiring neither extensive preparatory work nor long drying times: “An artist must be spontane-

ous. That's it. But to be spontaneous, one must master one's art. ... One must translate what one feels, but instantly, so to speak."³³

As of 1895, Degas worked almost exclusively in pastels.³⁴ Most of his late pastels were done on tracing paper, whose transparency allowed drawings to be re-used, either in reverse or identically. This paper may actually seem unsuitable, as it does not have great holding force, but the dealer Ambroise Vollard recognized Degas' preference and aptly described it as a drawing support that permitted correction: "He always hoped to be able to do it even better. And this continual search was the reason for the many tracings which Degas made of his drawings, and the reason for the public gossip: 'Degas repeats himself.' The tracing paper merely served the artist as a means of trying something new. Degas did these tests by starting his drawings outside the first contours. So it could happen that after more and more tests, a nude that was originally no larger than the palm of a hand became large as life, only to finally be rejected altogether."³⁵

Degas was always on the lookout for new technical tricks. He worked on cut sheets of tracing paper. Sometimes these did not provide enough space, so he had to take a second sheet, because his idea for the picture developed away from his initial conception. He then commissioned a frame-maker, Sothène Lézin, to mount the sheets on white paper to avoid a sheen or natural yellowing. Degas had observed this technique being used by his friend, the Italian painter and architectural draughtsman Luigi Chialiva (1842–1914), and drew conclusions for his own approach. The Italian also fixed the artist's pastels with a secret recipe which is assumed to have been based on casein. This substance affected the pastel surface less than the commercially available fixatives, which were either glossy or dulled the colors. Szafran ascribes the qualities of the above-mentioned recipe to the fixatives he uses today, which are produced in Holland.

Systematization and Breach of Rules

Szafran learned and adopted Degas' way of using tracing paper, and he had in common with Degas a passionate, questioning temperament. To ensure that the pigment particles adhere to the overly smooth paper, it has to be prepared in advance. Like Degas, Szafran began, with the help of tracing paper, to systematically work out his themes and motifs, especially in the plant pictures, masterfully exploring the color and light effects of the pastel chalks, which lose more or less of their surface light depending on the fixative. He made stencils out of wafer-thin zinc plate. Thanks to the systematization of the tracing process, Szafran arrived at a procedure that soon became characteristic of him: dissolving the identical while retaining the similar. What is superficially alike is enigmatic and always different. The rule itself thus demonstrates a deviation from it.



Fig. 12: Kurt Schwitters, *The Merzbau*, 1933

Szafran not only received decisive impulses from Degas as regards tracing. Degas, like Szafran, also fixed the separate layers of pastel, and their different applications gave the works a highly nuanced depth of light. One of Degas' collectors, Etienne Moreau-Nelaton, reports that his pastels could be rubbed with a finger without smudging or destroying them.³⁶

The History of Art Material as the History of Art

"Irrespective of the conditions dictated by his surroundings and the place in which he finds himself", noted Odilon Redon in 1913 in his diary, "the artist must to a certain degree subject himself to the possibilities and limitations of the technique he uses, be it pencil, charcoal, pastel, oil, printer's black inks, marble, bronze, clay or wood: they are all his companions and collaborators, and they too have a word to say in the fantasy product he is in the process of making. The art material is capable of betraying secrets; it has a soul of its own. The oracle speaks through the material."³⁷

So the history of art is also the history of art materials. Both are closely intertwined – increasingly so since the onset of industrialization. The history of the production of pastels themselves plays an outstanding role in this regard.

Szafran, who used pastel chalks made by Sennelier, had an important, and for his work, significant encounter one day in the early 1960s, when the paint dealer Lefèvre-Foinet took him to rue Rambuteau. It was shortly before he joined the Claude Bernard gallery, where he exhibited for the first time in 1964. For decades, the Roché sisters had been selling their pastels, made according to their own recipe, on rue Rambuteau. For Szafran the visit there meant the discovery of a whole new universe.

Pastels Roché

In the 18th century artists applied their pastels to *velin*, the gossamer skin of a young calf, which, as legend would have it, had to be still-born. The use of parchment as a picture support, a material which had enhanced the preciousness of the Psalters and Gospels since the Middle Ages, not only served to give the pastel a material value. The pigment particles adhered easily to this "living" ground, comparable, for example, to powder and make-up on human skin. In the eighteenth century, the possibilities for creating nuances with pastel sticks were much less developed than now. Artists had only about 100 different shades of chalk at their disposal. The technical revolution in the nineteenth century was to bring far-reaching changes. The number of shades of chalk increased rapidly.

Maison Macle, founded in 1720, was the main pastel maker. At that time, the Parisian pastels by Rosalba Carriera and Quentin de La Tour were famous all over Europe. In its early years, Maison Macle, like the still-existing Sennelier, founded in 1887, sold art materials, including handcrafted pastels. The pharmacist Henri Roché (1837–1924), a qualified chemist and biologist and pupil of the physicist Louis Pasteur, who later founded the Parisian Institut Pasteur, had his attention drawn by Pasteur to Maison Macle. Roché then gave up his previous activity to dedicate himself to the production and continual improvement of pastels. In 1878 Roché took over the company and founded the Maison du Pastel. At the time, it used to produce about 100 shades and its clients included Legros and Whistler in London, Chéret, Degas and numerous others. In 1887 it was already producing 500, and prior to the First World War more than 1,000 different colors. Henri Roché had several laboratories and studios as well as a shop in rue Grenier Saint Lazare, Paris. As of 1912, Roché worked closely with his son, the medical doctor Henri Roché (1868–1948), who carried on pastel fabrication alongside his profession (fig. 16). Together they moved the studios, labo-

ratories and sales area to 20 rue Rambuteau. The First World War crippled the business. When Henri Roché Senior died in 1924, his son took over and moved production to Saint-Martin-de-Bréthencourt, near Rambouillet, in 1930. Only a small shop remained in the backyard on rue Rambuteau, and it is still there today, open every Thursday from 2 to 6 pm. Thanks to continued research and diligence, Roché was soon producing about 1,650 shades. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, his clients included the artists Vuillard, KX Roussel, Gernez, Paul Elie Dubois, Flandrin, Brisgand, Guirand de Scevola, among others. The family were forced to flee during the war, but resumed business again in its wake. Madame Roché

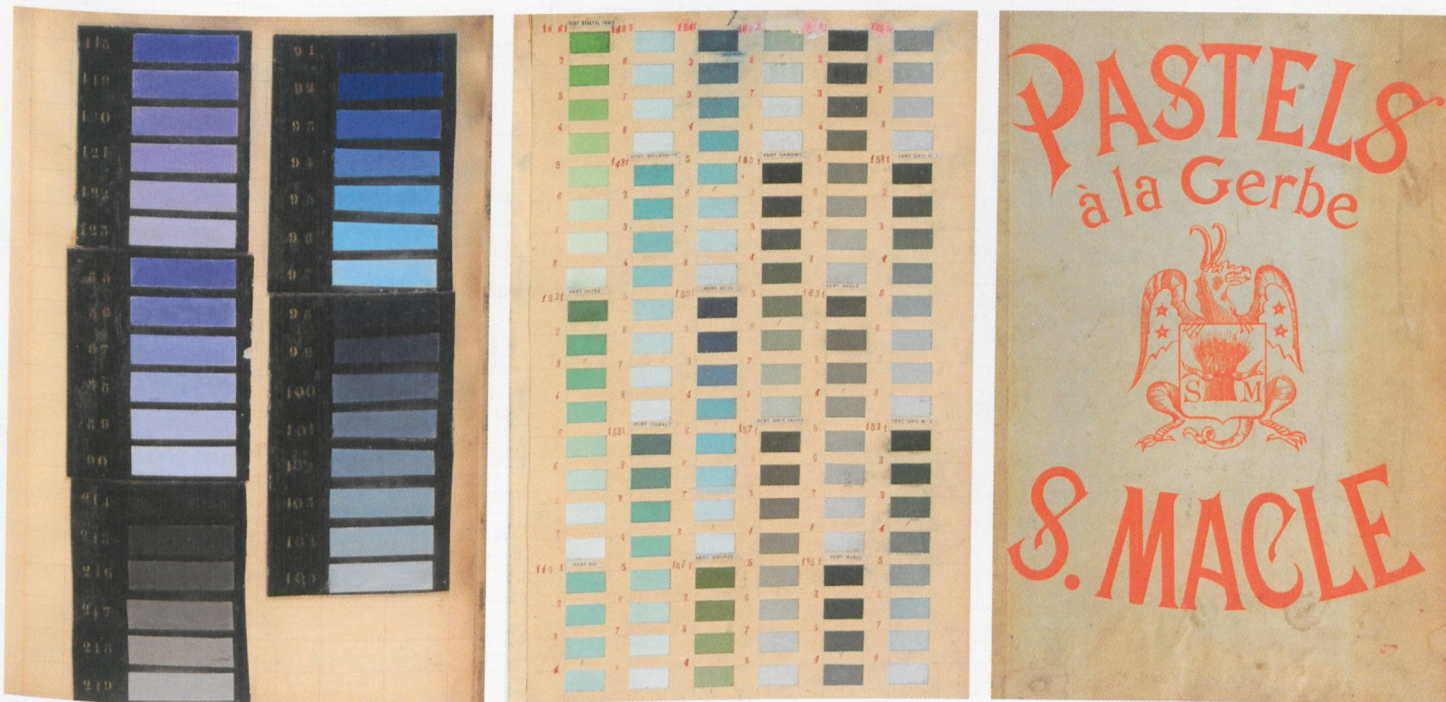


Fig. 13: Page from the sample book of the Maison du Pastel with 335 shades, Paris, 1872, Collection La Maison du Pastel, Paris

Fig. 14: Page from the pattern book of the Maison du Pastel with 1166 shades, Paris, 1910, Collection La Maison du Pastel, Paris

Fig. 15: Cover of the pattern book of the Maison du Pastel with 335 shades, Paris, 1872, Collection La Maison du Pastel, Paris

and her three daughters, Huberte, Gisèle and Denise, rebuilt the workshops and laboratories, which had been plundered by the German occupiers and then destroyed by the Allies. They took over the company after the death of Henri Roché in 1948, and the three daughters managed the pastel fabrication based on the family recipe until the death of the eldest, Huberte, in 1999. They then passed the business on to their young cousin Isabelle Roché, who today stocks about 800 shades for her clients.

Les bleus / The Blues

Szafran uses blue no. 7261 by Pastels Roché for his blue vegetation (fig. 17), a further leitmotif found in his immediate surroundings. Himself destitute, he relied for years on friends who put their studios at his disposal. It was 1974 before he was in a position to move from the Bellini studio into a studio of his own in Malakoff, on rue Vincent-Moris, where he still lives and works today. He discovered the fascination of vegetation in summer 1966 when, through his friend Riopelle, he was allowed to use the studio of the Chinese painter Zao Wou-Ki for several months: "I was fascinated by a magnificent philodendron – a rare sight in a house in those days – that looked splendid under the skylight and that I found impossible to draw," Szafran explains.³⁸ This inability became an obsession with him.

A short time later, in the conservatory at La Besnardière, Claude Bernard's country residence in Touraine, and then from memory until the year 2000, Szafran produced the first large compositions in which the blue pigment seems to swallow the charcoal drawing. There is something unsettling about the super-

Fig. 16: Doctor Henri Roché,
rue Grenier Saint-Lazare,
Paris, around 1905



imposition and framing of the multitudinous plants within this plane of blue. The almost hallucinatory shade, reminiscent of distance and sky blue, has nothing to do with the vegetal green familiar from the philodendrons and aralias in Szafran's studio.

The abstracted outline of the charcoal drawing indicates the organic aspect of the plant world, whose infinite growth is suggested in the serial replication. Added to this is the planar pigment application. Here the materiality of the applied color, the pigment and art material itself, points to the organic origin of that color. Reference has often been made to the fact that the term pastel has a double etymological root, and we mentioned above the Italian word "pasta" and its meaning. The second reference is to a dyer's plant, dyer's woad, *isatis tinctoria*, which was used to die fabrics indigo blue. After the Middle Ages, that plant was replaced by genuine imported indigo from the tropical papilionaceae *indigofera tinctoria*.³⁹

Yet this is not the only explanation for the impact made by the blue. It is linked with a metaphysical effect which, not least, alludes to the value that was retained when the shift was made in the Renaissance from gold ground to lapis lazuli blue in earthly and sacred landscapes. The transcendental breadth thus introduced into Szafran's works engenders the paradox of an experience located in the distant world of dreams, compounding the blue depth of space with palpable, visually direct rendering. The sometimes almost mathematical reconstruction of the leaf forms of palms and philodendrons that blot out the space has an ontological counterpart in the pure color space that eschews all mathematics and emerges fully from the impact of the material. Given this contrast, nothing is definitive any more in this state of constant change and transformation so typical of dream constructs and never-ending sequences whose resolution can only be assumed to be outside the realm of the imagination.

Vegetation in a Masterful Technique

Szafran's watercolor renderings of vegetation are much more numerous than his *Blues*. He discovered the fascination of this technique when he wanted to highlight his first lithographs, done in Piero Crom-

melynck's studio in 1976. The highlights were to be in watercolor, as in Degas' monotypes. Soon he regarded watercolor as particularly suitable for reproducing vegetation on a large scale: "My obsession with plants found its greatest correspondence there in 15 years. These large watercolors are the negative of the positive of the blue plants of the 1970s. They are the result of a chain reaction which produced infinite deviants."⁴⁰ Szafran again proved to be an untiring experimenter and discoverer. He subjected the watercolor medium to systematic, quasi scientific tests until he achieved the effect he wanted. He used it almost dry and always mixed with a few drops of *fiel de boeuf* (ox gall). The iridescence varied according to the quantity used. A Chinese friend watching him work said that without realizing it he had revived the old Chinese art of watercolor painting. Szafran is a famous artist in China, although he has never been there. In 1994 he was invited as a visiting professor to the China National Academy of Fine Arts, and the Chinese Pastellists' Society in Shanghai would like to appoint him honorary president of their society. In this regard, however, Szafran also resembles Degas, of whom Valéry wrote that no one "despised honors, advantages and fortunate gifts more deeply" than he.⁴¹

Chinese silk became Szafran's picture support of preference. The Chinese artist Lap Sze-to, introduced to him by Cartier-Bresson, gave him a present of a sample in the early 1990s. Although the 500-year-old bamboo fabric is complicated to prepare – it is stretched on board or doubled with tissue paper and then grounded with *colle de riz* so that it does not absorb too much paint – it is equally suitable for pastel and watercolor.

Whereas initially, watercolor allowed him to make ever larger formats with the aid of traced preliminary drawings, more recently Szafran has been preoccupied with bringing both techniques, pastel and watercolor, together – sometimes in monumental form, as in *Hommage à Jean Clair pour son exposition 'Cosmos'* (cat. 55). One sheet (cat. 11), dated 1980, already entailed a combination of both processes, although the picture areas remained separate. Now they interpenetrate. The transparent water-



Fig. 17: Sam Szafran, *Studio with Lilette*, 1974, pastel, 120 x 80 cm, Private collection

color, very thinly applied, enters into direct contact with the powdery opaque pigment that whitens the background of the green watercolor sheets. But Szafran's virtuosity does not end here: apart from pastel and watercolor, he also uses other techniques – lead pencil, color pencil, pastel chalks by other manufacturers. A symbiosis of tangibility and visual lightness seems to metaphorically resolve the apparent contradiction.

Almost every one of his vegetal compositions contains a counterpoint: Lilette in a kimono or an ikat, on a Thonet chair or a Gaudí bench, the boxes of pastels, the metal spiral staircase in the center of the studio, or the heavy cast-iron stove, while in the most recent works a copper pipe or similar installation, as the benchmark for the proliferating plants, may remind the viewer that he is not in some free, fantastic natural setting but in the artist's studio. Thus, all the different groups of works are linked by the line that already became manifest in the staircase theme as an isolated curving shape.

Lilette's appearance in miniature in the sometimes monumental pictures recalls a conversation Szafran had with Giacometti on the terrace of the Dôme in Montparnasse in June 1964. Giacometti pointed to a woman who was just crossing the road and said, "Look, the closer she comes, the more blurred everything gets." Szafran was impressed by that way of seeing, and perhaps it is that very manner of seeing, of fathoming, which he found so challenging in the technique of the pastel.

If, on close inspection, the 18th-century pastel chalks led to dissolution, to the discovery and legibility of the technique – which compared to the perfection of the impact from afar could be understood as virtuosity and mastery in control of the medium – then Szafran's technique, with its veils of superimposed layers, its scarcely perceptible interlocking of the "model drawings", continues in the vain hope of achieving clarity of seeing. It is that which sustains the miracle of their making. The details of that execution just cannot be grasped: there is no resolution of the puzzle, no end to the illusion.

Translation from German by Pauline Cumbers

- 1 Georges Perec, "LXXXIV", in Georges Perec, *Entretiens et conférences II, 1979–1981*, Mayenne, 2003, p. 328.
- 2 Karl Robert, *Le pastel. Traité pratique et complet*, Paris, 1896, pp. 21–22. Also: "What appeals to us about the pastel is its brilliant and velvety aspect which is borrowed from butterflies' wings and seems to have been invented solely to create cheerful pictures of women and flowers." in Frédéric Auguste Antoine Goupil, *Le pastel simplifié et perfectionné*, Paris, 1858, new edition 1971, p. 9.
- 3 Pierre Larousse, *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, t. XII, Paris, 1974, p. 376.
- 4 Jean Moréas, "Le symbolisme", *Le Figaro*, 18th September 1886, cited in Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, "Symbolismes", in *Le Mystère et l'éclat. Les pastels du Musée d'Orsay*, exh.-cat., Paris, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2008, pp. 128–131, p. 128.
- 5 Denis Diderot (ed.), *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences des arts et des métiers*, 36 vols., Paris 1751/80, vol. 12, Reprint Stuttgart, 1967, p. 153.
- 6 Claude Arnaud, « Poussières d'étoile », in exh.-cat., Paris, 2008, pp. 11–22, p. 15.
- 7 Charles Blanc, *Grammaire des arts du dessin. Architecture, Sculpture, Peinture*, Paris 1880, p. 587.
- 8 S. Jozan, *Du Pastel, traité de sa composition, de sa fabrication, de son emploi dans la peinture*, Paris 1847, S. 5 ; See also Frédéric Auguste Antoine Goupil, *Le Pastel simplifié et perfectionné*, Paris 1858. The French landscape painter Camille Flers wrote in 1846: "Pastel painting fell into oblivion after blossoming for a certain period thanks to several famous portrait painters. ... Today, it is experiencing a renaissance and again taking its place in our exhibitions." cited from Jean Clair, "Neuf Notes sur la peintures au pastel augmentées de quelques parenthèses", in : *Le Pastel*, exhib.-cat., Ancy-le Franc, Château d'Ancy-le-Franc, Ancy-le-Franc 1980, no page number.
- 9 Stéphane Guégan, « Retour en grâce » in exhib.-cat. Paris 2008.
- 10 Michel Le Bris, « Sam Szafran. L'Atelier dans l'atelier », in *Sam Szafran*, exhib.-cat., Paris, Musée de la Vie Romantique, Paris, 2000, p. 9.
- 11 Sam Szafran, in Daniel Marchesseau in this publication, p. 169.
- 12 « Le pastel est, à la fois, la ligne et la couleur », in Geneviève Monnier, *Le pastel*, Geneva, 1992, p. 5.
- 13 Letter from Fouad El-Etr to Sam Szafran, 13 October 1974, in *Sam Szafran, Pastels*, exhib.-cat., Geneva, Galerie Artel, Geneva 1974, no page number.
- 14 On the Académie de la Grande Chaumière see Peter Kropmanns and Carina Schäfer, "Private Akademien und Ateliers im Paris der Jahrhundertwende", in *Die große Inspiration. Deutsche Künstler in der Akademie Matisse*, Part III, Ahlen, Kunst Museum Ahlen, Ahlen 2004, pp. 25–38.
- 15 He works there with his wife, the artist Catherine Boumeester.
- 16 "Sam Szafran se confie à Jean Clair", *Beaux-Arts*, No. 34, April 1986, p. 36.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Jean Clair, *Sam Szafran*, Paris, 1996, p. 41.
- 19 Pierre Schneider, in *Sam Szafran*, exh.-cat., Paris, Galerie Jacques Kerchache Paris, Paris 1965, no page number.
- 20 "Die Gasse begann von allen Seiten zu riechen. Es roch [...] nach Jodoform, nach Fett von Pommes Frites.", in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, (1910) Frankfurt a.M. 2000, p. 9.
- 21 Fouad El-Etr, "Esquisse d'un traité du pastel", in *Sam Szafran*, exhib.-cat., Geneva, Galerie Artel, Geneva 1974, no page numbers.
- 22 Alberto Giacometti, *Was ich suche*, Zürich 1973, pp. 14–15. German transl. Katrin Reinhart.
- 23 Jean Clair 1996, p. 69.
- 24 Kurt Schwitters, exhib.-cat., Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris 1994.
- 25 Dietmar Elger, "Der Merzbau", in *Kurt Schwitters, 1887–1948*, exhib.-cat., Sprengel Museum, Hannover 1986, pp. 248–254.
- 26 Georges Perec, *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, London, 2010, p.55.
- 27 *Sam Szafran 1970*, printed in 1960–1972, *douze ans d'art contemporain en France*, exhib.-cat., Grand Palais, Paris, 1972, p. 338.
- 28 Jean-Etienne Liotard, *Traité des principes et des règles de la peinture* [1781], new edition, Geneva, 2007.
- 29 Paul Valéry, *Erinnerungen an Degas*, transl. by Walter Zemp, Zurich, 1940, p. 8.
- 30 Denis Rouart, *Degas à la recherche de sa technique*, Paris 1945.
- 31 Cf. Plates, pp. 10–11, in exh.-cat. Paris 2008.
- 32 Cf. Marie-Pierre Salé, "Jean-François Millet. Le renouveau du pastel au milieu du XIX^e siècle", in exh.-cat. Paris, 2008, pp. 40–42, p. 42.
- 33 Antonin Proust, "Edouard Manet. Souvenirs", in *La Revue Blanche*, May 1897, p. 427, cited from Isabelle Cahn, "Edouard Manet et son entourage", in exh.-cat. Paris 2008, pp. 50–53, p. 51.
- 34 Cf. Anne Roquebert, "Edgar Degas réinvente le pastel", in exh.-cat. Paris 2008, pp. 64–69, p. 67.
- 35 Ambroise Vollard, *Degas (1834–1917)*, Paris 1924, p. 68.
- 36 Anne Roquebert 2008, pp. 64–69, p. 68.
- 37 Odilon Redon, *A soi-même. Journal (1867–1915). Notes sur la vie, L'art et les artistes*, Paris 1979, p. 128.
- 38 Sam Szafran, see the text by Daniel Marchesseau in this publication, p. 182.
- 39 Cf. Geneviève Monnier, "Le pastel, technique d'hier et d'aujourd'hui", in *idem* 1992, pp. 109–111.
- 40 Cf. Daniel Marchesseau in this publication, p. 182.
- 41 Paul Valéry 1940, p. 9.