

## « Heraldic murals »

*preface to the monograph « Parois » edited by éditions La Pionnière, 2019.*

There was a relatively short period – from the eleventh to the fourteenth century – when western culture read images not in depth but in thickness, plane by plane. Perspective had not yet been discovered and the eye, after slicing the image into layers, would begin its examination at the back and finish at the front – in the opposite order to the one adopted during the late Middle Ages that we use to this day.

Éric Pillot's photographs remind me of this pre-Giotto way of looking at and describing pictures. As in Romanesque miniatures or in early coats of arms, the essential features are at the back of the picture, creating a backdrop on top of which the other more or less secondary elements are added or layered, and forming new planes – flaked plaster or rendering, the damaged floor, vegetation that has come alive where one least expected it, at the foot of a wall.

Unpicking these pictures is therefore akin to describing heraldry, starting from the background plane and moving consecutively, plane by plane, closer to the beholder's eye, this presentation cohering plate by plate into a kind of mural roll of arms. *Argent masoned sable and spotted with the same, with two paly gold broken and disjointed, issuant from a mount in base sinople and surmounting all . . .*

The field against which Éric Pillot constructs his work is a wall, as this book's title stresses. Sometimes this wall stands alone, sometimes a few sprouts of vegetation or tiny objects are included in the photograph. Alone or not, however, the wall is never blank, i.e. monochrome or unblemished, let alone new or recent. On the contrary, the pictures show walls that have known better days. Their materials are decrepit; the structure is sometimes visible beneath some wretched vestigial roughcast; here and there, various "sticking plasters" appear, like pictures within a picture. As for the colours, they have faded or completely disappeared, or else the surface has been repainted and has faded again. Grey is dominant but still distinctly sets off the few coloured marks scattered over the wall's surface and its chance scars.

Cracks, streaks, stains and spots do appear to turn these walls into surfaces etched with the vicissitudes of history, the wear and tear of time and the miseries of men. Humans are absent from the frame, but their very absence serves to highlight these many mutilations. They seduce and intrigue the beholder, just as they stirred the photographer's emotions and curiosity. Each wall is clearly individualised, alive and well despite its injuries, marking the starting point of a story that seems to point out of frame – into the margins of the picture, of course, as any photograph does, but also, and above all, towards the other side of the wall. In stories of chivalry and children's fairy tales, the adventure often begins on the far side of the ford, on the other side of the bridge. Here, it starts beyond the wall, which no longer seems an insurmountable obstacle nor even a flat surface against

which one might feel like kicking a ball, but instead like an open window and an invitation to dream.

Each of us is free to imagine what lies behind these misleadingly silent walls and all the things that will happen behind these forever-wounded walls.

Michel Pastoureau.

*Translation by Simon Pare*