

## Louvred

In the seventeenth century, a Flemish chemist coined the word "gas", close to the Dutch word "chaos" and derived from the Greek  $\chi\alpha\omicron\varsigma$  that designated in mythology the unsoundable space pre-existing the origin of all things. Jan Baptist van Helmont was looking to introduce the notion of void.

In Paris, Masahide Otani observed a lorry loaded with gas bottles. The artist had what he calls a "vision of sculpture". These solemn canisters used to be part of our homes, placed at the bottom of cellars or in utility rooms. Under pressure, the imposing image suggests a possible, even cataclysmic danger. The sign offered itself to Masahide Otani, still life being ever present. He grasped the proximity of what unveiled itself beneath his eyes and that often escapes the attention of our absorbed minds.

Masahide Otani's tranquil quest sublimes everyday anecdotes. Here, the objects seem to be in suspension. The usual flow is interrupted. Each apparition testifies to a *voluminosity*<sup>1</sup> where presence depends on the gaze. In a gaseous state, matter has no specific shape or volume, gas occupies everything. These large erect phantoms carry the mark of a gesture, consequence of time on matter: the plaster covering the hessian canvas has been scratched before being gently anointed with beeswax.

In 2009, his practice of serial casting was omnipresent and sought the impossible: total disappearance of the artist's expression and affects. From now on, Masahide Otani has accepted his limits, giving up on his fantasy of the disappearance of gesture. Twelve years on, still haunted by the apparition of the gas bottles, he is comfortable with the body that he inhabits: "whatever I do, I can't escape it" and is developing a new series of sculpted plaster casts: thirty centimetres in diameter, one hundred and forty centimetres high, hollow and made from raw plaster softened by the enveloping wax.

Although he says he is indifferent to the past, visionary figures reluctantly taunt his memory. The elements of a shutter are carved from one unique piece of walnut wood. Without any joints, this louvred composition of tilted strips stops direct sunlight whilst letting air circulate. Also called *jalousies*, shutters allow you to observe the outside without being seen. The object placed on the floor suggests once again a biased vision.

Elsewhere, a large vertical painting attempts to approach the materiality of light, these mysterious beams that cut through our troubled or still drowsy pupils. The artist looks to translate a recurring observation. Once again, he cannot escape the sensitive body in which he is.

Élise Girardot, November 2021

---

<sup>1</sup> Masahide Otani borrows this expression from philosopher Merleau-Ponty.