

Studio Visit: Carole Vanderlinden

Reste encore à savoir, d'ailleurs, si le peintre est tenu à peindre 'ce qu'il voit' à l'usage de ceux qui regardent, ou de peindre pour 'voir ce qu'il peint' à son seul usage et à celui des yeux grands ouverts sur autre chose qu'une réalité restreinte.

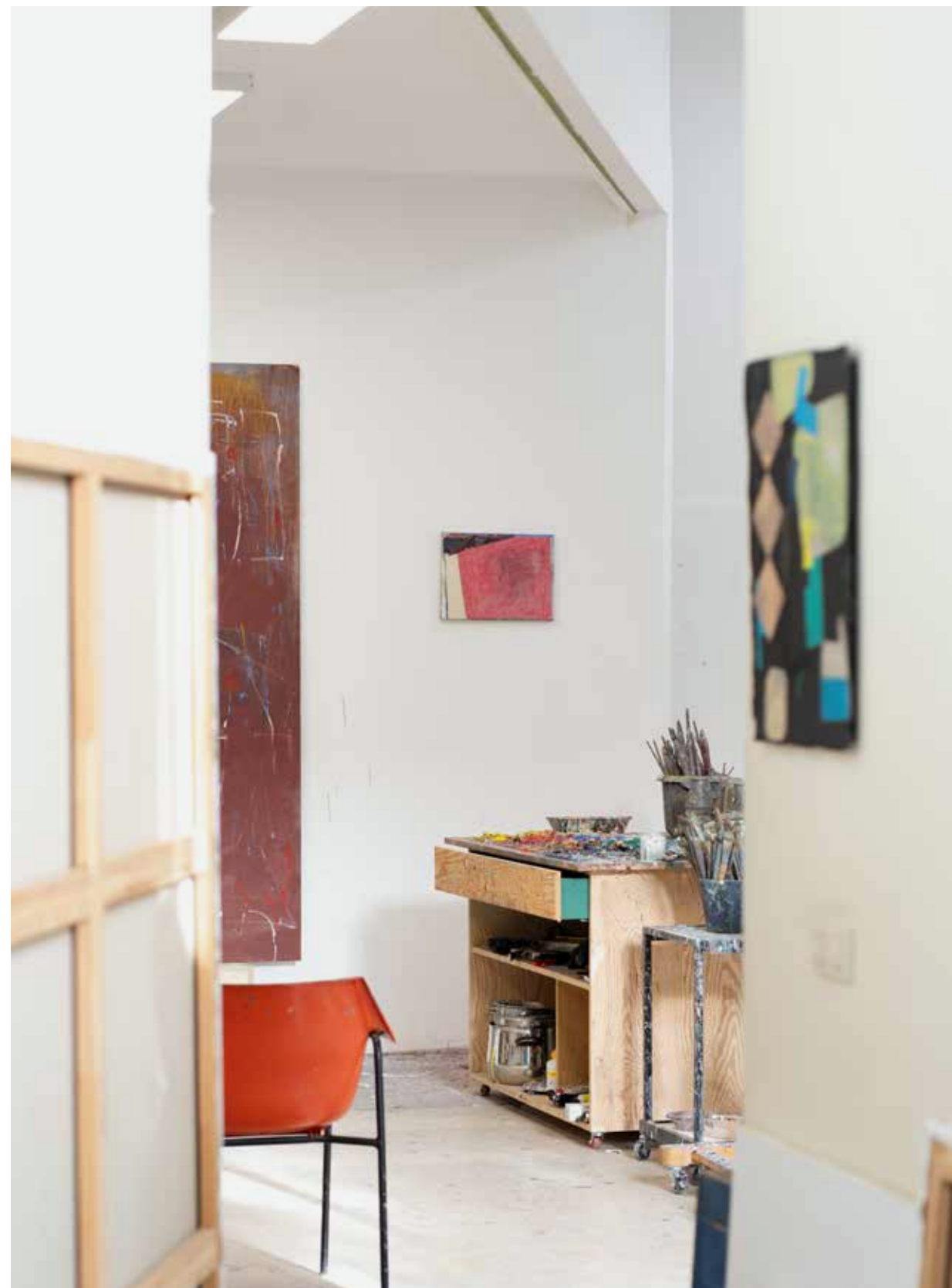
— Francis Picabia¹

This was my first meeting with Carole Vanderlinden and I was very curious about the place where she works, hoping to gain more insight into her artistic process. Arriving at her address in Brussels, I was immediately struck by the atypical, contemporary character of the building in front of me, an architectural gem from 1988 designed by Marie-José Van Hee and Johan Van Dessel.

For the past two years, Carole Vanderlinden has been working in several rooms in the rear part of this L-shaped duplex. She let me in through an entrance on the side of the building and we traversed an elongated corridor that led to a large space spread over two floors. On the ground floor, my eye was drawn to a large canvas rendered in rust-red tones with many layers, a work in progress. Numerous other colourful works in the space were illuminated by the glazed wall on the opposite side; a worktable stood in front of a window overlooking a patio. The ground floor, Carole tells me, is where she paints. Upstairs, among various objects and books, she makes sketches and drawings. In her work, Carole is guided by intuition; she embraces unexpected turns and doesn't like to adhere to fixed concepts. Her conviction is



Studio view Carole Vanderlinden, 2024, photo Miles



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that her paintings should speak for themselves. She emphasises the interconnectedness of everything in her paintings, which are never mere imitations of reality.

AC (Angelique Campens) How did you initially start drawing and painting?

CV (Carole Vanderlinden) I have always drawn since childhood. I never stopped. In fact, it started the moment I turned six, the age when I started writing and reading. I first experienced great pleasure in writing — the contact with the paper, the visual impact of writing ... That's a beautiful memory for me. But the restriction of having to write between lines soon became too limiting; there were too many rules. Drawing, on the other hand, offered me more freedom. While many children start drawing less at that age as they learn other forms of communication, my case was different; I started drawing more and more and never stopped.

AC Before we discuss your process, let's talk about your daily routine and how that translates into your work. What is a typical day in the studio like?

CV I don't have a particular routine, but it is important for me to get to my studio quickly. That's why I try to arrive very early and take time throughout the day to focus on different aspects of my work. In fact, the only routine I have is that I am in my studio every day, except when I am teaching. Even on holidays I'm here. I am never busy with an exhibition when I am in my studio, I am busy with my work. I don't need a deadline to find my way.

AC Does your arbitrary way of organising your day contribute to the development of new ideas? What role does that play in your working method?

CV My approach is genuinely intuitive. It really depends on how I feel in the moment. When I enter the studio, I never have a plan, I never know what I'm going to do — well, almost never (laughs). I'm exaggerating a bit. If I dwell too long on finding a solution for a particular problem, it doesn't work out. In the meantime, I'm always trying out different things, and suddenly I'll have a projection or an idea, but it's never really clear. It's through making that the idea occurs, so I have to stay busy. It often happens that the moments when I'm not thinking about

my work are precisely the moments when I unexpectedly find a solution. I often tell people that. For example, on a lesser day, when I have done almost nothing and decide to go home, but before leaving still decide to do something very quickly ... Usually, the eureka moment comes at that particular moment, but it can be very frustrating. Now, however, I realise that the whole day was important in getting to that point.

AC Can you tell me a bit more about that process? Your paintings often, though not always, consist of several layers. Like this rust-red painting here that you're still working on.

CV Sometimes there are very fine layers. This work is an important step, because here there are actually many layers and it's always important to find a certain materiality, colour palette and texture that provoke me to work further. I'm very happy with what I see at the moment, but it's just not finished yet.

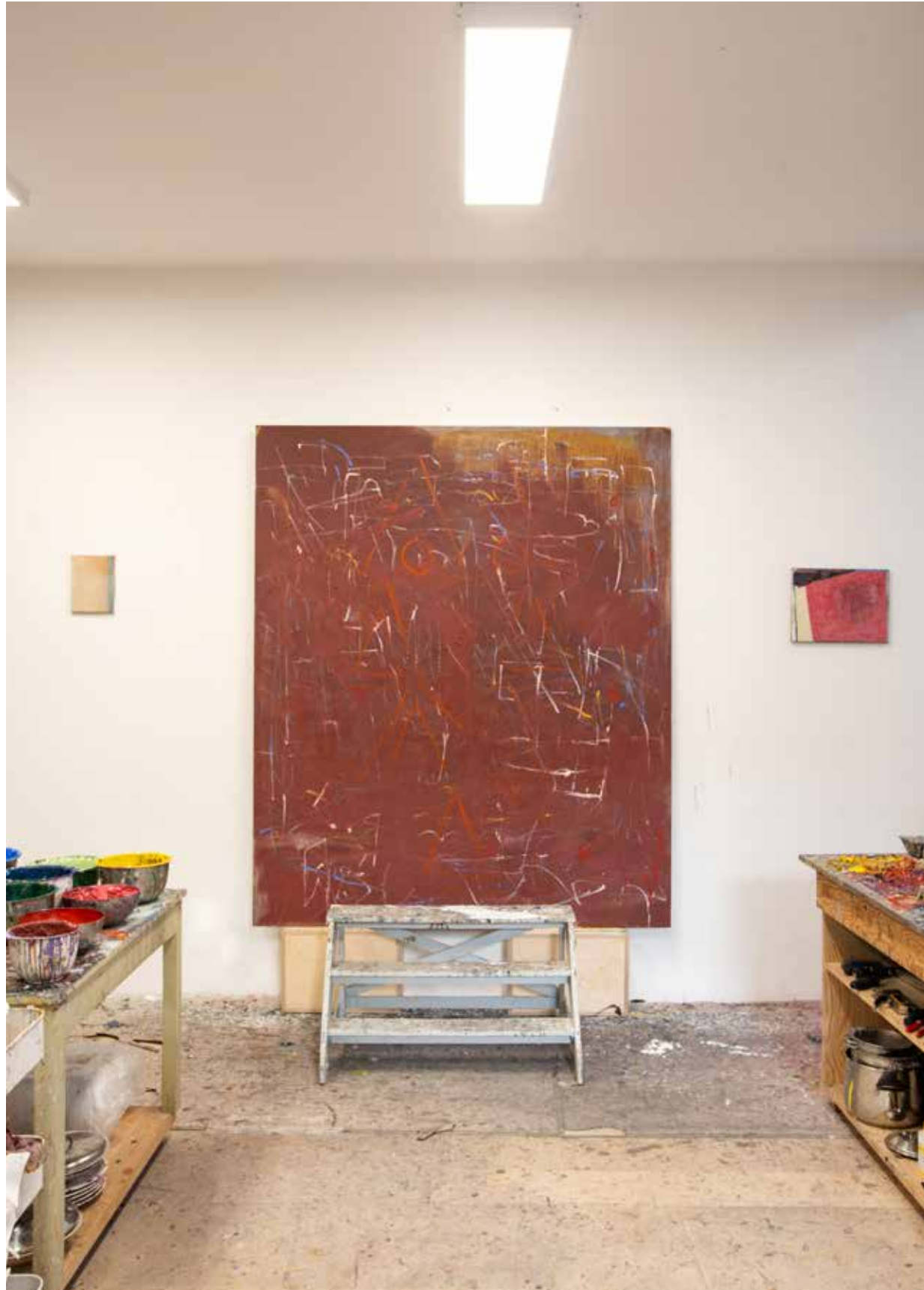
AC Why isn't it finished?

CV It's a feeling. It's really between states. Maybe I should add something very small, or maybe I should go back and rework the whole surface. There are a thousand possibilities in painting. It's about making a choice. And that's the hardest thing. There are always different dynamics at play in my work. Sometimes it's very physical, direct or spontaneous, while at other times it's more polished; rhythm is also very important.

AC When you are stuck with something, do you look at the drawings in your sketchbooks?

CV Sometimes, yes; sometimes, no. I try to keep moving at all times because I know that most of the time, it's by doing, by painting that I arrive at solutions. It's often at these moments that I work very quickly and most intuitively. It's intuition that saves me.

AC Your sketchbooks give a clear insight into your artistic process and act as a visual record of your inspiration, which is then reflected in your paintings. Can you explain how these two media relate to each other?



Studio view Carole Vanderlinden, 2024, photo Miles



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CV Although my sketches are connected to my paintings, that connection is not direct. I will never copy anything from my sketches. My confidence lies in my visual memory. It's a bit of a mix of details, memories, concrete images — a fusion of different elements. I work in three ways: in my sketchbooks, my works on paper and my works on canvas. And occasionally something new comes in between. For example, the works on the ground here are a mix of oil paint and collages. It started as an experiment with colour while I was working on other paintings — and then these other works emerged on my worktable, a bit casually and without any specific intention. After a few months, I noticed that there were more and more of them. They eventually became a part of my work and I exhibited them for the first time two years ago in the exhibition 'A Slipping Glance' at Plus-One Gallery. They are situated between the work on paper and the paintings, in a kind of 'parentheses'... The concept behind these works is that they originate from an unconscious or absent-minded process; they are both more spontaneous and less intentional than a painting. I continue to make them.

AC Could you say these works are linked to an *écriture automatique*, but with image and form instead of writing?

CV It's a paradox. Although I am aware that I am creating a new work, it's essentially an unconscious, constantly intuitive and unexpected process; casual without intention. I never know what it will produce.

AC Instead of sticking to a single style or technique, you seem intent on exploring different styles and approaches in your work, from medieval art to weaving techniques, that could be derived from folk art. What are your sources of inspiration? How do you integrate these influences into your work?

CV All visual art forms can be an inspiration. But it's not just visual art. Music is also important. It's a real mix of genres, sources, media and subjects. I read a lot. Now I'm busy with René Guénon (1886–1951) and his attacks on Western science, which he criticises for only being interested in what can be seen, touched or grasped by reason. Metaphysical knowledge is left out. Guénon is opposed to Cartesian reasoning, which he understands as rejecting intuition.

AC For you, intuition does play a crucial role, right?

CV I now accept more and more that I work constantly with intuition. I used to have a problem accepting this because there are different ways of painting: more conceptual, more concrete, more intellectual. And I always wondered, 'Where do I fit in between?' Now, finally, I am now more at ease with myself because I realise that intuition is my strength. I think a lot about

Schopenhauer, who speaks very precisely about intuition. He says it is a way to feel certain without needing intellectual or concrete evidence.

AC The emphasis on intuition and coincidence is something your work has in common with Dadaism.

CV Dadaism is one of the movements that has enriched me in terms of spirituality and intellectualism. Dadaism can be about starting from nothing and then making something anyway. I think that's fantastic, yes. It's given me great comfort at times, because I always feel like I have a lot of questions but few answers regarding the general state of the world or life. Every time I return to the Dada manifesto, it gives me hope. But the role of intuition and coincidence in my work is more complex; intuition isn't just cognitive, it's also very physical. You work with your whole body, not just your hands. I really work with the consciousness of my entire body. I make contact with the work through my hands, through the brush. The hand is an extension of our thoughts, like an 'instrument' physically connected to the painting. That is why I say I work physically. The French philosopher Étienne Gilson says it beautifully about painting: 'En peinture, il convient de situer l'art non dans la pensée seule ni dans la main seule, mais dans le peintre, c'est-à-dire : dans l'homme tout entier.'²

AC You mentioned that you often draw from life?

CV Daily life is important because I am not just a painter when I'm in my studio. Regardless of where I am or what I am doing, I always act like a painter and consider everything that attracts me as potential material for my work. I can use anything. It just has to fascinate me. It can be banal; it doesn't matter.

AC What's fantastic about your work is that it's inherently diverse and yet immediately recognisable. A recurring theme is the tension between the geometric and the figurative.

CV For me, there is no hierarchy in terms of subject matter. In fact, I am not really concerned with the subject itself. The subjects are often quite banal, and simply serve as a means of completing the work. The heart of the work is the mixture of abstract and very concrete details, the association of many elements; it's also always a response to the world. There's a mix of genres, a coming together of things that shouldn't meet.

1. Bernard Marcadé, *Francis Picabia, rastaquouère* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 2021).
2. Etienne Gilson, *Peinture Et Réalité* (Paris: Vrin, 1958).



AC This leads me to a question about technique — why do you use oil paint and not acrylic?

CV I find acrylic too limiting. With oil paint, time becomes a factor. Sometimes it dries very slowly and you can work on a piece while it's still wet. Sometimes it's good that a layer is very dry so you can start painting on it. Acrylic is truly plastic; with oil paint you have a certain sensuality. The contact with the paint itself is important to achieve a certain creamy density, and you can create infinite transparencies, textures and thicknesses.

AC Does colour play an important role in this? Do you also choose or blend colours based on intuition?

CV It always comes down to a combination of colour and material. I use a lot of contrasts, different brushes, printing techniques and sometimes collage. I start with a thick layer of white paint and then mix my colours and I almost never use a colour that comes straight out of a jar. This makes it possible to emphasise the materiality, for example, when working very quickly with a dry brush. It is always a game between what I will choose to keep and what I will get rid of. It varies.

AC You often work on materials other than canvas, such as recuperated materials.

CV Yes, I enjoy working with recuperated materials. I started working more on wood after my participation in Kathmandu Triennale in Nepal, which was organised by S.M.A.K. During the event, I worked on-site and looked to my environment

for materials. There were still many traces of the earthquake that had occurred two years prior, a lot of mess and chaos. It left a deep impression on me. I recovered material on the spot, such as a wooden panel, despite its fragility. I thought, 'Carole this is Kathmandu; you just have to work.' Eventually, I ended up making about 18 works there, using recovered materials and canvases. It was a challenge to respond to my surroundings in that way. Working on-site in different environments is important for me. Although I had worked with recuperated materials before 2017, the experience in Kathmandu renewed my enjoyment of doing so.

AC If you feel comfortable working anywhere, how important is your studio?

CV I used to think it was impossible to work outside my studio. But now I don't think the place is so crucial. In the end, it's about you. Your work comes from within yourself even when you move or travel. It did take me a while to realise this. But inspiration is everywhere. In my studio, I interpret and channel that inspiration. I always stay alert. A small detail can become a starting point, or the different ways I remember that detail. My studio is ultimately a place of work rather than a source of inspiration, but that's precisely why it's so important.

Group exhibition 'Disabstraction Sunrise' through 24 March 2024, Plus-One Gallery, Antwerp, www.plus-one.be

Solo exhibition at Karma, Los Angeles, from 22 March through 18 May 2024

'37 OV Project Disorder, Transmission, Love in Silence: Goro Kakei >< Carole Vanderlinden' from 24 April through 8 June 2024, OV Project, Brussels, www.ovproject.com

Carole Vanderlinden: A Slipping Glance with texts by Mélanie Deboutte and Ory Dessau, Karma, March 2024

A monograph on the work of Carole Vanderlinden is forthcoming from S.M.A.K. Ghent