

The extraordinary starts close to hand. Imagination and dream cohabit in the making of images. In the sun of a late afternoon I watched a big black dog, a handsome beast, its two forelegs pressed against a gate, looking out for people in the distance with that strange gaze old dogs have – a bit empty, dark and seemingly blind, especially when they're black, when they are fragments of night and their immense muzzle sticks out far from their eyes. It immediately brought to mind as if in a dream the print of an austere nineteenth-century figure, a Lincoln, say, or a Jules Ferry. Prints in those days created a half-light. And I suddenly thought again of the "penitents" that Jakob Gautel summoned up, more than ten years earlier, in the streets of Bourges and in the empty or abandoned houses and passages. Ghostly, hooded figures, whose faces were invisible, silhouettes one could never have caught, even by shining a torch on them, for they were imaginary presences, ghosts visible only to those who are ready to see them.

Is it the same presence, the same absence, those of dream, that imprint themselves on our consciousness whenever we approach what is our own shadow, our supposedly recorded reality, that we have such trouble recognising if we have not been told that it really is towards ourselves, towards our image, that our groping progress is leading?

For nearly a year now, I have been studying dreams, assiduously, exhaustingly. Like the explorer of a world invisible to others, I know their light, their chiaroscuro, their identities, which do not last, sometimes their golden light. In most dreams there are people. Often, rather than just paper and a pen or a pencil to make fleeting notes before they vanish, I would like to be able to write down a reference in luminous intensity, to be able to give a photographic reference. An intensity, like a light that is concentrated, at the limit of what can be done without dissipating the essential.

Jakob Gautel, it seems to me, is in the common space seeking shadows, presences, comparable "spectres," if we take that word in its scientific sense (the only one that is appropriate here), that relate the "other" density of things and places. What they enclosed, what they no longer contain. The invisible hidden in the visible. By a poetic play on light, he brings them momentarily before us, then immediately moves away. The approach is more concrete than that of dreams, which are always elusive, but brings into play the powerful attraction of the same imaginary network.

Henri-Alexis Baatsch

Translation : Charles Penwarden

Text in *Jakob Gautel. Absences*, cat. expo., coll. "L'Atelier du sculpteur/musée Zadkine", éditions Paris-Musées, 2006.