

CARAVAGGIO,
Judith and Holofernes
DANIEL BUREN,
*Pyramidal, Haut-
Relief-A5, Travail in situ*

6, rue du Pont de Lodi, Paris 6

18/04/2019 to 04/05/2019

The exhibition « Caravaggio, *Judith and Holofernes* / Daniel Buren, *Pyramidal, Haut-Relief-A5, travail in situ* » is accessible from Tuesday to Saturday from 11am to 7pm at 6 rue du Pont de Lodi, Paris 6.

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Kamel Mennour is pleased to present for the first time in France, *Judith and Holofernes*, an exceptional painting by Caravaggio—discovered in an attic in Toulouse in 2014 and authenticated in 2016 by the expert in Old Masters Éric Turquin—together with Daniel Buren's site-specific work, *Pyramidal, haut-relief – A5, travail in situ*.

Before being placed on auction on the 27th of June under the direction of Marc Labarbe, this classic masterpiece by the uncontested master of Italian Baroque—a tumultuous genius born in Milan in 1571, who died in Porto Ercole in 1610, responsible for only sixty five known works at the moment of the discovery—will be in hypnotic and completely unprecedented dialogue with the resolutely contemporary work of the French artist (born in 1938 in Boulogne-Billancourt). This striking face-to-face, majestically lit by light designer Madjid Hakimi, will be present in the space at 6 rue du Pont de Lodi.

Éric Turquin: Kamel, this is a magnificent juxtaposition: Caravaggio's *Judith and Holofernes*, and Daniel Buren's *Pyramidal, haut-relief*.

Kamel Mennour: One of the strengths of the gallery is in creating these encounters between great monsters of art history... Kazimir Malevich and François Morellet on the theme of the square... Daniel Buren and Alberto Giacometti 1964-1966, a moment when the two artists were at once contemporaries and at opposite poles in terms of creation. Here the gap is immense. More than 400 years separate the two works.

Éric Turquin: Yes, 410 years, but in a way, the temporal distance is abolished by their being brought together in this way. With Daniel Buren, every exhibition is a work in itself, and then both of the artists share the same desire to confront the painting of their time. Caravaggio demolished the mannerism that was suffocating Rome. Poussin said that Caravaggio had come into the world to destroy painting! For Roger Fry in 1905, he is the first modern painter, the first to proceed not through evolution but rather revolution. And Daniel Buren, for his part, wanted to abolish the Paris School, which had saturated Paris by then, he wanted to be in complete rupture with the history of art.

Kamel Mennour: Above all, we are dealing here with works that are complete opposites, that's what makes this arrangement work. Caravaggio is telling a story, he dramatises it with a red curtain and a tight composition with three figures who tie the action into the midst of the painting. Daniel's high relief doesn't tell anything in itself, it's dry and strictly non-pictorial. Even if the colours, the black and white, are very Caravaggio.

Éric Turquin: Black, white, and the mirrors too. Caravaggio used a mirror, we know this from a police report from when he had to flee Rome in 1606. At that time, a mirror was very expensive. Daniel Buren tells us that for him, the mirror is a very interesting material, very stable and...

cheap! He multiplies space and, here in particular, he multiplies the painting.

Kamel Mennour: The mirrors in Daniel's high relief repeat Judith's gaze. Frankly, her gaze is unbearable, and the fact that it gets reflected in the high relief is what shuts us up in the optical trap of this arrangement. There is no escape from her gaze and her murderous gesture.

Éric Turquin: You know, Judith's gaze tells us something very precise. Caravaggio is an artist who attempts to incarnate Holy Writ. With her gaze here, Judith reveals the cowardice of the Bethulians who wanted to give themselves up to the Assyrians. She says, 'Hear me, and I will do a thing, which shall go throughout all generations to the children of our nation', and, 'Smite by the deceit of my lips the servant with the prince, and the prince with the servant: break down their stateliness by the hand of a woman.' She calls us to witness. Through the interpellation of her gaze, Caravaggio instructs us to read the Text.

Kamel Mennour: It was you, Éric, who showed this to me. Holofernes' dirty fingernails, the idea of opposition between the hand that has been tanned by the sun and the white body of a soldier, which has always been protected beneath his armour. They're hooks for getting inside the painting and recalling the Text. They're also extraordinary pieces of painting in themselves. And the high relief mirrors in Daniel Buren's piece re-enact this fragmentation effect and let us see what might have escaped us. For Daniel, 'the mirror is the third eye, it makes it possible to see what you don't see by yourself...' (*Les Écrits*, 2011).

Éric Turquin: That's Caravaggio, and it's also the light. That powerful vertical light, with its hidden source, dramatising his chiaroscuro, in particular in the final years, which were his most original, and to which this painting belongs. Madjid Hakimi has created a magnificent lighting arrangement for the occasion, reconnecting with this spirit of Caravaggio's and respecting the painting, which is not easy to light.

Kamel Mennour: Daniel was very happy to work with Madjid again for this project. In 2014, Madjid made the lights for *Daphnis et Chloé* at the Opéra de Paris, choreographed by Benjamin Millepied, and with set design by Daniel Buren. With this powerful light, similar to natural light, plunging into a dark room, Madjid sort of recreates Caravaggio's studio, no?

Éric Turquin: Yes. Historians found documents from a legal dispute between Caravaggio and his land-lady because in order to get this lighting effect, he'd made a hole in the roof of his studio! On the other hand, we don't know if he really used the 'camera oscura' technique and the projection of the figures he painted onto his canvas through a system of lenses and mirrors. This is David Hockney's hypothesis, for instance. It might be true but it's more of an artist's vision than the vision of an historian.

Kamel Mennour: And then, for a site-specific work by Daniel Buren to recreate a studio, that would really beat everything, coming from him, who creates exclusively site-specific work, absolutely outside the bounds of the studio!

Éric Turquin: From an art-historical perspective, it's also extraordinary that Daniel Buren now meets up with a *Judith and Holofernes*. He reminded us that he exhibited at the Yvon Lambert Gallery in 1979—so forty years ago—with the theme, 'who has seen *Judith and Holofernes*?', a painting by Artemisia Gentileschi that he had managed to see in the Vasari corridor of the Uffizi in Florence, which was closed to the public. But at that time, he had worked around a lack, with the painting not only missing but inaccessible. In this case, it's the opposite—the painting is present, even extremely present!

Kamel Mennour: The ultra-presence of the painting is due to its violence, to the artistic solutions that Caravaggio found... as well as the strong sexual charged contained in the painting, no?

Éric Turquin: Caravaggio is a great artist, this is why he excites so much interest, so many interpretations and analyses. Our times are reflected in him... Kamel, I would like to thank you again for this invitation to see him.