

Paul Flapper: Self Interview (September 2001)

How did you come across the paintings of Chris Villars?

I was searching the Internet for information on American composer Morton Feldman. On Chris Villars' very comprehensive Morton Feldman website I also found a link to his personal homepage with pictures of some of his paintings (and a few short stories he wrote, unfortunately removed now).

What was your first impression of the paintings?

I was intrigued. Some of the paintings had a strange kind of immediate attraction, but I didn't quite understand why. And there was this indefinite feeling that it mattered, that it was worth exploring. I guess there was kind of an intellectual challenge as well.

Could you be more specific? What kind of attraction?

Well, I'm very fascinated by the process of communication in art, especially when accomplished with sparse means. The "highly simplified" paintings (in the words of the painter) manage to communicate in a very subtle, intuitive way. I agree with Chris that you should not try to express the meaning of his paintings in words, but if you insist on words, here are a few: balance, intimacy, consolation, sophistication.

And what exactly is the challenge?

The challenge is in trying to find out how this communication is achieved. I'm fascinated by the experience that a work of art gradually reveals its secrets by interacting with the observer's mind.

Did you already find out how Chris Villars accomplishes communication in his paintings?

Of course not! The fun is not in solving the mystery, but in gradually acquiring more understanding of it. Just imagine we would solve the mystery of Art...!

Do you own one or more of his paintings?

Yes, I do! We developed a regular contact via e-mail, discussing both music and painting. After my positive response he kindly offered to send me some of his paintings.

Did you know he never sold one of his paintings?

Yes, that's what I read in a recent interview. First of all I think Chris is far more interested in real appreciation than in money. But of course, every painter needs some kind of recognition, and I guess people paying for your art is one of the ways to get it. I hope he will manage to organize an exhibition one day. I think that an appropriate setting would help people to approach his paintings in the right state of mind.

Do you see a link between the paintings and music, Feldman's music perhaps?

I don't see a direct link to Feldman's music, although I think that his paintings will be more appreciated by Feldman admirers than by Boulez adepts. To me some of his works seem more related to the music of Federico Mompou (in terms of intimacy and sophisticated simplicity) or to John Cage (because of their natural balance), but these associations are probably very personal.

And do you see links to other painters?

My knowledge of painting is far too insufficient to answer this question. My "relations" with his paintings haven't yet reached the stage where these links are relevant to me. I still approach his paintings as purely personal expressions. Musical associations are a different matter, because they seem to come naturally to me.

Did you ever meet the painter in person?

Yes, actually twice. We first met in London for the UK premiere of Feldman's "For Philip Guston", a favourite work of both Chris and me. The second meeting was in Holland where Chris, his wife and I not only attended a Feldman recital, but also had a bike ride and a terrible Dutch meal. Another meeting is planned in November for a performance of Feldman's second String Quartet in Utrecht.

Did you know Chris thinks he has probably painted his last painting because he feels he has said everything he wanted to express in painting?

Yes, I've read the interview. I would regret this decision, because he made some paintings that became very dear to me. Let's hope it's a temporary creative block. I envy everybody with creative talents, so it's hard for me to imagine a decision not to use it any more. But if he really decides to stop painting I feel lucky to have a few of his paintings hanging on the walls of my apartment ...