

JAN MICHALSKI PRIZE FOR LITERATURE 2010 SELECTION

Frédéric Martinez *Claude Monet « Une vie au fil de l'eau »*

Fabienne Verdier's favourite for the Jan Michalski Prize

Finally a young author who takes pleasure in guiding us through the substance of dreams. This is an erudite corpus in tribute to the leading impressionist, the gardener painter who was happy among flowers : **Claude Monet « Une vie au fil de l'eau »**, published by Editions Tallendier.

After the great success of his book « *Prends garde à la lenteur des choses. Paul Jean Toulet, une vie en morceaux* », published in 2008, **Frédéric Martinez** offers us this fluid and passionate biography.

Two hundred and fifty glorious pages, dotted with the simple small delights of the master's existence. A life of solitary retirement. The writing helps us to discern a tangible poetry in his life. We are invited into an intimacy with the everyday life and genesis of the works of the silent painter. As time goes by, we make out the distinctive smell of the grilled *audouillette* that he ate as soon as he rose in the morning, together with a glass of white wine, before setting off for his studio.

And then there are a series of vibrant tableaux: his work on the rocks of Belle-Ile-en-Mer, the creation of the pond of water lilies in his garden, the Woman with the Sunshade, haystacks in late summer, poppies, the chalk cliffs of Caux ...

Contemplative intensity, scenes of tenderness and bitterness of a man possessed, avid for the latest news of those around him, almost submerged in the elusive reflections of reality. His concentration is such that he often forgets himself in the great whole.

On these meditative levels, we take all the risks in his company to go and study his subjects. We are at his side, just next to his easel, which the wild seas are attempting to sweep away! And then the dialogue with the elements starts to take form ...

The substance of his spirit, the pigments on his palette and his experience of the countryside all come together to give body on canvas to a unity of fleeting impressions. We are then drawn into a meandering tale which blends doubt and fervour.

A mysterious alchemy emerges from the delightful murmurings of the author and, little by little, we come to understand what we need to know, in the same way as the ode to silence by Jules Renard.

I already know how to watch the clouds pass by. I also know how to be still. And I nearly know how to be silent. An invitation to an internal journey and the thought processes of the painter, driven his contrasting idleness and tempestuous moods. It educates us, builds us up, fills us with fear and admiration through the extracts from his letters with small and delicious historical anecdotes.

We experience in a remarkable way the art of painting. This genius of the paintbrush with an implacable lucidity, which cannot stop itself recording the slightest structures of the real, without any sentimentalism, in their precise and vibrant luminosity ...

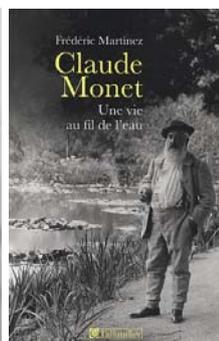
And we gently come to understand that painting is an inhumane, unbearable battle. Only a force of nature at work can succeed day after day. But so few beings are able to enter into communion with the very principle of the life which surrounds us ! We discover his early liking for art from the far East, in his reference to *that marvellous art in which the whole of life, of movement, totally stylized is portrayed in a line.*

A serious and slight portrait, modest and accurate in its approach to an asceticism entirely devoted to depicting with his brush the prodigious existence of a constantly changing universe.

The painter and the author grant us access in « *Une vie au fil de l'eau* » to this sacred and inexhaustible source from which every being should find inspiration: contemplation. *Look closely at this flower in the wind with its petals bent back. Isn't it the incarnation of truth ? I am in a state of delight,* wrote Claude Monet to a friend in Giverny on 20 May 1883.

Fabienne Verdier

Member of the Jury



Frédéric Martinez

Claude Monet, Une vie au fil de l'eau

Biography

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