

Resilience and Other Healings

Yannick De Serre

5 November – 10 December 2022

The artist is a mani(fold) being whose professional life is often variegated and multifaceted. Yannick De Serre's life is remarkable in that he divides his time between the studio and the hospital. As both an artist and a nurse, he is touched by human beings, attentive to the transitions that mark their existence, and intrigued by the cycles that punctuate their lives. Between life and death, absence and presence, he narrates a poetry of the liminal and the threshold. For eighteen years, his profession as a nurse has infiltrated his studio daily, nourishing him, helping him to move forward, and reminding him that life is a series of stages to go through and rites to celebrate. In the exhibition *Resilience and Other Healings*, he presents works that are both delicate and compelling and that attest to a touching dialogue between the artist and the nurse.

Kindness guides De Serre's steps in his daily life: the nurse tends to patients' wounds; he takes care of them with a constant and persistent hope that they will heal or get better. However, sometimes this is not enough. When death is inevitable, De Serre accompanies his patients with all the gentleness that we might imagine him to have. And afterwards? Nothing... or at least, emptiness. There is no structure in place for accompanying nursing staff in this short and brutal after that is in fact a work trauma. It's difficult to let this wound come to the surface. There's no time! One must keep going; other patients require care, other individuals must be accompanied. Nevertheless, every death carries an emotional weight. While some deaths may be quieter, others are undeniably heavier. That said, they all need to be let go and transformed. Some kind of mourning is necessary!

Since 2004, De Serre has been reinterpreting the different stages of mourning through a personal ritual. He transcends the loss through specific actions embodied in an artistic gesture. After each death, the artist takes the time to select a handkerchief, in memoriam. In the studio, this piece of cloth isn't used to wipe or hold back tears; it accompanies the artist's hand, becoming a companion to his creative work. What prevails is the automatic process of the nurse who follows routine care procedures in a specific order. Until the next death. Then, De Serre carefully folds the handkerchief in half twice, keeps it, and buys another one. At the end of the year,

he puts the folded handkerchiefs in the centre of a sheet of Japanese paper, which is crumpled and ink-stained, which he also folds in half twice. The seventeen bundles that make up the work *LINCEUL* [Shroud] are presented on shelves. The eighteenth piece, which marks the year 2022, has been left unfolded. When the nurse takes precedence over the artist, he sutures letters of words in such a way so as to make other equally meaningful words stand out. *LINCEUL* then could be the **LIEU** [place] in which absence and presence meet. *MORTALITE* could be the cornerstone of any **RITE** of passage. The thread of illness gains power; it transcends meaning.

Elsewhere, words are engraved in the material. They accompany the nurse's instruments, which are placed beside the artist's studio tools. It is as though together, the words and tools narrate a bittersweet story of mourning: *Pour adoucir ... le dialogue* [to ease ... the conversation] we read on an old wooden stethoscope. These reminders of the past encourage a mix of nostalgia and joy, a sense of holding on and letting go at a time when we're unsure how to manage the present emotional flow in light of the future. While two medical spatulas recall the relentlessness of brooding over and *Remuer le souvenir* [dwelling on memories], the scalpel asks us to release, remove, *Retrancher* [excise]. Further on, other words evoke the importance of *Préserver l'affect* [preserving emotion]. Three amber glass apothecary jars each contain the ashes of former works, scraps of gold leaf, and bits of sutures and needles.

To conserve can mean to "save something from destruction" but also to protect the heartstrings. But then, how can we lessen the burden of pain? Through sensitive prose. Letters in gold leaf have been hot-pressed on sheets of Japanese paper. These letters compose words that are sometimes tender and sometimes scathing and whose application manages to alleviate the terror: *tendre trauma* [tender trauma], *arrimer le vide* [secure the emptiness], *draper nos cœurs* [cloak our hearts], *afin de garder en mémoire* [in order to remember], *couvrir le sentiment* [cover up feeling]. In these words and in the entire exhibition, there is the hope of transcending. Crossing a threshold. Being resilient.

— Émilie Grangon

Translation: Oana Avasilichioaei