

Claude Guénard, Artist-traveler

Entering the world of art in childhood, a fine-arts teacher at the age of 23, this immense artist has had several lives: he strode the boxing rings, trampled the tatamis, hunted in the bush and taught in different art schools in Africa for 20 years, than was a project manager for the national education administration. Between Africa, the West and Asia, Claude Guénard can travel from the largest museum to the gutters of a favela, from a shed to a rich rococo palace with the same pleasure, the same desire for offbeat and original encounters.

An artist endowed with an astounding working technique characterized by the rapidity and virtuosity of his execution, he permits us – a rare thing – to discover our own imaginary world in his works. Because Guénard, before anything else, is generous. This particular attention to the other is an uncommon art that requires understanding and sharing codes.

You do not meet Claude Guénard: you are captivated. Irresistibly, wherever he is, all eyes turn to him. An antique sculpture, with muscular arms, his neck and strong torso, the whole of the person being expressiveness and emphatic attitudes. You listen to his volubility composed of a joyous exuberance with a touch of humor. A power of solar life rooted in the earth and in flesh. Claude Guénard talks, questions, demystifies references.

The artist is always elegantly dressed, but if his suit is alpaca, it can be hot pink, his colorful shirt a marked contrast; his feet sport extraordinary shoes.

His face has a touch of the Breton (his native Mayenne is at the crossroads of Anjou, Normandy and Brittany) that cannot be defined. His cheekbones are high and, if his nose isn't flattened, you sense the boxer he once was, which gives him an air of a good-looking guy who's a bit of a bandit. He is loquacious and the timbre of his voice vibrates in a specific manner, like those instruments that produce very powerful sounds. His mischievous eyes have an always lively expression. A smile appears in a flash: the power of the artist's face then softens, a child's gentleness lights up his features, a little like sunbeams that, at nightfall, cross the dunes. Claude Guénard is going to take you into his world.

Consequently, in his protean work, Claude Guénard's paintings, sculptures and scratchings enrich us with sensations that come from his voyages. Why is this so disturbing? Because the voyage no longer exists. The genuine voyage: that of discoverers and adventurers. Guénard is one of the rare people who crisscrosses the world as a confrontation with an Elsewhere, propelled by the desire for the encounter.

Desire to see, to be enriched by the Other to enrich the Other in his turn.

The monumentality of a curiosity such as this efficiently serves his denunciatory ideas and conveys, in his visual artist's language, his desire for transmission. In

1771, Trévoux's dictionary set out the components of curiosity in three words: "Curiosus, cupidus, studiosus": attention, desire, the passion of knowing. This is the main thrust of this artist who experiences every voyage as an adventure, a discovery, an investigation...

Encounters intertwine and discussions enrich each other. Claude Guénard is a frenetic collector of multicultural explorations influenced in his search by every iconographic form: political, religious, propaganda panels, posters for pornographic films, photos of traditional weddings as well as counterfeit articles and graffiti. All the luminescence of his work is enriched by emotions stored in his memory during his travels and what he brings back from them.

This is how his studio has become a caravanserai and how his acquisitions unearthed in the four corners of the planet are his primary working tool.

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