

L'USINE GALERIE

40 rue du Doyenné · B-1180 Bruxelles

Ouvert jeudi - samedi de 14 h à 18h, dimanche de 16 h à 18h ou sur rendez-vous

About the work of Arié Mandelbaum

Often in these new works by Mandelbaum the wound is painting the body. The principal colour of the wound is sanguine. Reminiscent of the coloured chalk used by the artists during the Renaissance and afterwards, when drawing the bodies of martyrs or portraits of declared ephemeral beauty.

A wound is an orifice, a way in and out, and all the natural orifices of the body are focal points in these paintings because they recall the lips of the wound. The wound is not recent, yet it is unhealed.

As well as bodies we see objects – a radiator, a metal chair, a fuse-box, a television- these show that the wound is surrounded by daily life. Sometimes the arrangement of the painting refers to a much earlier image – Masaccio's *Adam and Eve* or a fresco by Piero della Francesca, and these references suggest that the wound is old, was perhaps there from the beginning.

What does it mean to say that a wound is painting a body? All drawing, even when done directly from life, involves memory; here memory is inseparable from a memory of pain. The solitary wound is

searching for the company of other orifices, or for the company to be found within them.

A wound is also a loss, and so it looks for what remains of bodies who have gone or will go. It proceeds by touch, not the touch of fingers, but of consanguinity, in the basic literal sense of the word, of bloodstain touching bloodstain.

Then why are these sheets of paper – which are like dressings lifted off a wound – nevertheless calm, reassuring, affirmative? The French word *béant* may help.

Béant – gaping. A gaping wound. Yet the adjective comes from the verb *béer* – to be open, or, figuratively, to dream, to muse, to wonder. A somewhat similar “alliance” subsists the English adjective *tender*, meaning painful or sore, and, at the same time, gentle, loving.

The wound gapes at a closed eyelid, the hollow behind a knee, the lobe of an ear, the smile of a pair of lips, the pit of a neck, the crepe de chine folds of a scrotum, a vagina's tongue. Arié's paintings, containing pain, continually marvel at what the body is like.

John Berger, September 2005