PORTRAIT OF A COLLECTOR
or
A FORTUNATE MAN

Patrick Autréaux

Hasty and awkward creatures of the moment,
it is we who interrupt the action of the gods.

Constantine Cavafy

The collection of geometrical abstract works, bringing together some forty artists, French and European, donated to the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Cambrai is the work of André Le Bozec, the partner of the painter Guy de Lussigny who was himself born in Cambrai.
An obsessive resolve can be detected behind certain collections. What is moving in that of André Le Bozec, whose limits he is himself aware of, is that it speaks neither of madness, nor of stalking or manoeuvring, nor of rising to a challenge, but of a path.
At the time of the temporary exhibition, he had dubbed the room he preferred the silent room: "People began to speak softly as soon as they crossed the threshold." On display were a canvas by Andreas Brandt, a granite work by Tschentscher, a white relief by Reynolds, some grey drawings from Eve Gramatzski, a very pale yellow Calderara, some pencil lines by Max Mahlmann, a column by madé, a white canvas by Guy de Lussigny. Works that verge on the almost nothing. His inward-looking gaze never forsook its patient invitation to visit these soundless and unimposing places.
As though he was not in fact the artisan, as though what he had achieved was beyond him, he disappeared into the background in presenting this collection which, in his eyes, was born of some necessity which made him humble and left him, as it were, astonished in the face of what had been accomplished.
These pages are born from meetings with André Le Bozec in his Parisian flat and in his partner's studio. Conversations that recount the life of a collector? No. Fragments of the story of a man, in the course of which a meaning finally comes to light.

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André is sitting on a sofa. He is not a tall man. He is wearing a pastel shirt, a dark blazer, well-polished shoes. Before us is an armchair, the work of an American designer. Guy de Lussigny had bought it at the end of the sixties. André loves to talk about the material world as works of art. Black leather, a wooden body moulded in rosewood. It's a comfortable chair to read and drink a glass of whisky in. Drink a glass of whisky. He has rarely done so since the death of his companion. A few days ago, he surprised himself by ringing the entry phone three times. As he used to do. The last ring was choked. He climbed the stairs in tears. Everything reminded him of the past that particular evening.

Guy de Lussigny moved into this flat towards the end of the sixties. He lived here until the eve of his death. From the windows you can see one of Paris's finest panoramas: the Hôtel de Ville, Saint-Gervais, the Île Saint-Louis and the

Seine; it's impressive, but one ends up feeling the prisoner of such a view. It took him too much out of himself. If he had lived we would have moved to a place without a view, with no other landscape than that of the paintings of the artists that we loved: Brandt, Reynolds, Steinbrenner, Calderara, and Gramatzki no doubt. Our little art gallery. It's Cambrai's good fortune…

… I worked a great deal on the temporary hanging of the collection. It had been agreed that I would recover the works I wished to keep after the exhibition; when I saw the ensemble, I realized that I could remove nothing. I had to give *everything*.

People often ask why I donated the collection in my lifetime. It's inexplicable for me, at least in simple terms. People praise my generosity, I am awarded the insignia of the *Ordre des Arts et des Lettres*. I had no choice: it was a question of survival. When Guy died, there was such an emptiness. We had known each other for nearly forty years.

His parents had a clothes shop in Cambrai. One of the fine shops of the town. Guy used to dress the shop windows when he was young. He would come to Paris to choose the latest fashions. As for me, I was born in Paris and I have lived there since my return from Brittany where I spent the years of the Occupation. We first met at friends'. We saw each other every week; he would arrive on Saturday and leave on Tuesday morning. At the end of the sixties Guy went to live in Paris; he began to work as director and collaborator at the Denise René Gallery. I was at Larousse where I worked my way up from the data-processing department to become head of sales. I had a one-room flat in the Marais district at the time, before the area became fashionable, then I lived in various districts. We remained together for the most part. When I retired I came to live with Guy; we bought a house in the South of France. We had friends down there. Guy was not a society man but he enjoyed people's company, generally people older than himself, simple people like the wrought-iron craftsman Giaco of San Gimignano or more famous ones: Gino Severini, Auguste Herbin, Antonio Calderara or Jean Dewasne. He loved to speak in a small informal gathering, long discussions with two or three friends. He was a well-read man, a tireless reader. Everything provided nourishment for his painting… He was a musician too. He won a First Prize in his piano exams at the Cambrai Conservatory. If he had not become a painter, he would have had a career in music. It has been said that his work is musical, and for good reason.

He was about to celebrate his seventieth birthday when the back and forth of visits to the doctors, who give no definite information, started: the medical exams, the waiting, the uncertain diagnosis. The treatments begin. A node appears. A biopsy follows. What we feared… Guy came out of Professor X's office and said: there we are, it's as we thought. Then there was all the running around: the sessions of chemotherapy, the fatigue and the questions. Guy was not a model patient; he got impatient. He had been told that each session would last two hours, but it lasted a whole afternoon. He didn't understand why they made people wait, why they didn't explain what was going on, why the ambulances were late. I listened to him. What could I answer? Being ill is a lonely business, we die alone.

When you see the works he produced in his last months, you are surprised; he worked a lot. I hardly ever set foot in his studio any more except to help him put things away or move the heavy works. I discovered the final works after his death, his testament so to speak, small-sized works with bright colours. They were lined up in the studio; I found the sketch of the last one, the preliminary drawings and the preparatory work on the canvas. His papers were in order with catalogue cards prepared for each work. I had encouraged him to finish the inventory for the descriptive catalogue; it was a source of comfort for us both I believe.

He remained as lucid as was possible under such circumstances. That lucidity, and his not knowing exactly what the situation was, made a painful combination. In this sort of ordeal you are like a child who instinctively grasps what's going on. Even if there's nothing to understand. No reason why… When Guy was feeling a bit better after the first courses of treatment, he had to sort out his studio, destroy what had to be destroyed, sign what hadn't been signed. A lot of artists among his friends did not preserve their work in their lifetime. For several weeks on end we went to his studio together. He was sitting where you are sitting now; I took out the canvasses to show him them. After an hour, sometimes less, he'd had enough. We would come back the next day, or another day. He sorted the drawings, the studies and the gouaches on his own. Forty-five years of painting: some one and a half thousand works.

This was an obviously trying period, but he had made friends at the hospital. There were two Italian women in particular, from Florence and Sienna, with whom he loved to talk. Guy knew Italy well, especially Tuscany. It was during his first visit, I believe, that he met Gino Severini, one of the last great figures of Italian futurism. Severini was an old gentleman. While passing through Cortona, Guy got in touch. Severini invited him round and remarked the quality of the works that Guy showed him. It was he who was later to introduce him to Colette Allendy… Guy was a straightforward person; he was forthright throughout his life. He wouldn't hesitate in a restaurant to join in a conversation with the people sitting at the next table; he would break the ice and we spent pleasant times with strangers. He dared to go and knock on the door of older artists. Such was the case with Severini, and with Auguste Herbin, who had influenced him at the end of the fifties. When he was sixteen or seventeen, he had even visited the aged Gide…

… When these Italian ladies were present during the chemotherapy treatment, it was a warm, exuberant, very lively time. And then they died, Guy didn't know this. One day I ran into the husband of the lady from Florence. Her friend from Sienna had just died at home. He had a stoical look when he informed me. His wife was also dying. A little later I helped him to deal with the hospital administration paperwork, his wife wanted to go back home; I did what I could, I had learned Italian listening to Guy and his friends in Italy. The week after we met, she could no longer be moved, she died that evening. This tall suntanned man had gone grey; standing in front of the cancer specialist secretary's office, he looked like a statue in a ruined temple. He said: "Don't say a word to your friend." A long time after, I found myself in Florence in the street where these people had a delicatessen; they had showed us a photo of it.

I recognized the shop-front and the name. It was in the afternoon, the rolling mechanical shutters were down.

When the inheritance had been dealt with, the solicitor said: "And now, what am I to do if something happens to you?" I hadn't the faintest idea. A few months later the project for the donation came up. That's what saved me. Nothing interested me anymore; I would cry for no apparent reason, everything weighed down on me. And the question remained: what was I going to do with Guy's work?

There are works of art and there is the putting together of a collection, and the theatre of a world that every collection has the ambition to represent. The theatre of a world which is often unaware of its own existence. I imagine this man as he unwraps the pictures from the plastic bubble wrap and the brown wrapping paper and lays them all out around him. Like an archaeologist who is moved when he glimpses the underlying unity in the variety. The unity of this diversity with its fascinating complexity which one suddenly has the impression can be summed up in a few very simple rules. He confronts the works. He keeps coming across the keys to a meaning which he no doubt suspected existed but which had, till then, escaped his notice. Giving reveals. And this revelation is the only good that makes us greater. Giving enables us to possess: to get to the heart of the essence of what we abandon.

… This adventure had unfolded slowly, almost imperceptibly, and its coherence appears to me only now. Seeing an order emerge is always a moving experience. I had this impression when I saw the whole of Guy's work reassembled. It was only after he had died that I was able to take stock of the importance of what I had done during those years with Guy, and that I felt the need to save it. I think it a sad thing to break up a collection that you have spent your whole life putting together. Recently Sotheby's put the Pottiée-Sperri collection up for auction. This bibliophile, a connoisseur of Montaigne, a surgeon by profession, had in particular built up a collection of rare editions of the *Essays* published in 1580, 1588 and 1595, old editions of translations, a few volumes bearing Montaigne's ex-libris. He died suddenly and his collection was dispersed. He can't have made the necessary arrangements, or perhaps didn't want to. Such a collection could have been left to public libraries… It was for my own peace of mind that I wanted to donate my collection, so that Guy's work would survive. In order to give a meaning to it all… Guy knew Pottiée-Sperri who, moreover, had arrangements made to be buried at Saint-Michel-de-Montaigne. He regularly attended the meetings of the association of the Friends of Montaigne and Guy frequently saw him there. I will say more about Montaigne and Guy later. Guy would have liked to have been buried in the famous tower…

The last exhibition of Guy's work was organized at the Cambrai Museum. It was like a symbol for him as he had never before exhibited his work in his town of birth. After the funeral ceremony his friends and a lot of artists who loved him gathered in the Cambrai Museum in the midst of his work. The exhibited works returned to the studio a few days later. The same night, the caretaker called me at home to say there was a fire in the building. I arrived in a dishevelled state in front of the gateway. The firemen wouldn't let anyone through. A neighbour had shot himself in the head; a fire broke out and spread. Miraculously the studio escaped unscathed, you could smell the smoke

but that was all. Guy's work had to be put in a safe place. I gave one canvas to Cambrai, there was an exhibition in Belgium and another in Germany. The art galleries kept some works in storage. The months went by. It was a friend from Cambrai who first suggested the idea of a donation.

Many people have helped me and I've been fortunate in this respect. It's not an easy thing to take one's life out of the cupboards. The president of the Friends of the Museum has been my main support, the enthusiastic advocate who was at my side when this collection was proposed to the municipal and regional authorities. The meaning of the donation really had to become fully apparent in Cambrai. He encouraged me to be generous while I was still alive. He loves his town and saw this donation as an opportunity to make Cambrai into a centre for Constructive Art. And he understood before I did what I was doing for Guy: few people manage to build a chapel to the memory of those they have lost… A lot of monuments have first of all been mausoleums for loved ones, for dead friends. Even if they are more than that, they touch us because of that as well. The *Essays* are such an edifice…

… This process which is motivated by a fear of dying and of chaos is at work in all collections. Yes… This obscure need to hoard and to hand down which is a response to the fear that what one has loved, that by which one felt perpetuated and rendered greater than oneself, more lasting than oneself, only endures if you take care of it… Since his death I have never stopped thinking of how I could defend Guy's work. What would he have done in my place? The question tormented me, but is pointless. Guy was born in Cambrai, his last exhibition was put on there, and it was logical that he should return there. It shouldn't be forgotten that all this was accomplished because of Guy. Without him I would have collected works of art but not in such a consistent way.

In setting up home in the South of France a few years earlier I had had a foretaste of the collection. On the walls there were works by Aurélie Nemours, Andreas Brandt, Josef Albers, Hans Steinbrenner… and the confirmation that it all held together. These works that I hung with Guy I couldn't donate; they will find their destination after my death… Guy left me on my own when I was buying. He knew by looking at me if I had a purchase in mind or with me… It was a joy for me to show him an oil painting by André Heurtaux, beige and almond green, the collages of Marcelle Cahn, the water-colour by Jeanne Kosnick-Kloss found in the flea market, or the green, yellow and blue gouache by Sonia Delaunay… We lived in the company of the work for a few days then I wrapped it up carefully and put it in store. I hadn't seen certain works for years.

Like the little things I haven't given, and that I'd forgotten all about, some of which are anecdotal. A steel sculpture by Ricardo Fernandez – two interlocking parallelepipeds, a promotion label for a bottle of Riesling drawn by Imre Kocsis; decompositions of circles, a serigraph by Hermann Brühl… It was moving to see them resurface; they are souvenirs, stages, moments I shared with those who are no longer here…

… I set out the main works in Guy's studio. I hardly slept the night before the visit from Nadine Lehni who represented the administration of the Museums

of France. There was so much at stake. I now realized what I had done; it was unthinkable that everything be dispersed. I began by explaining. It all came naturally: Guy's death and this collection centred on his presence. I had to speak of my life with him otherwise you can't understand anything. And then there was the way in which I had conceived this collection. When I bought a work, I thought with what artist or with what other work it would go; if it didn't fit with anything, the decision was made; I didn't want a break in the spirit behind my little imaginary museum. Almost all the works were put away, as is the case with a lot of collectors, in boxes, in cupboards, in wardrobes. Some works were hung on the walls—few in number—especially in Paris, through lack of space. The idea of a donation had become a necessity…

Between the idea of the donation and its accomplishment, three years went by. It kept my head above water. Not long before this project of a donation, I thought of opening a gallery. And then I think I didn't want to go to all the bother. I would have wanted to invite certain artists who haven't received the recognition they deserve. Is *deserve* the right term to use in this respect? There are not that many. Rare are those who can aspire to a one-man exhibition. How many have not gone through fallow periods or exist only through a few very good works? I could quote well-known examples. I remembered discussions with Guy, scenes that took place when visiting artists; the minor figures who overstated their case, the embittered artists and the others. Artists are first and foremost human beings—even when their works are on display in museums, and some need to be reminded of this; they have a sensitivity which blows up trivial details out of proportion, and some of them have egos that you have to know how to handle!... I lived with an artist for nearly forty years. Guy wasn't easy. I know a bit about how it works. He possessed qualities which made up for it all. He didn't cheat, he was always searching. This demanding aspect of his nature was devoted to something which was beyond him and lifted us both, me as well as him. A lot of artists have a presence in their entourage; sometimes there are several people, it's something vital. And it's often a silent presence: I'm thinking of Heurtaux's wife. Guy didn't know her, she slipped away when he went to André Heurtaux's studio. Sometimes he heard the sound of footsteps, a shuffling noise from the next room. During a posthumous exhibition at the Tavet Museum in Pontoise, a small woman came up to him: "Are you Guy de Lussigny? My husband esteemed and admired you…" He had seen her at last.

To come back to my idea of setting up a gallery. I regret the fact that there is a lot of petty-mindedness and opportunism among the artists. I thought again of this particular reality; I was heading for rows and wrangling, and dramatic situations. I gave up the idea straightaway. Fortunately. I wouldn't have been able to devote all my attention to this donation. In any case, I've never liked speculation; it's not my style. I bought works, and found pleasure in assembling this inner mausoleum, but I didn't think in a coherent way of names or investments; I saw a lot of exhibitions which weren't devoted to Constructive Art, but I held fast to my guiding principal: be it a failing or a quality, I've never lost sight of it. The only exception was a drawing by Sergio Manzi, a friend of Guy's from San Gimignano. It's a figurative drawing that hung for a long time in our house in the South of France. A Tuscan beach… a few lines, very little matter.

The collection built up slowly because of a lack of money, but I don't regret it. If more money had been available, I would have learned to *look* less quickly. I began buying works when Guy was working with Denise René. My first purchase was a serigraph by Josef Albers. Constructive Art was still poorly represented in Paris. I acquired the most highly valued works of the collection at a time when this sort of art didn't receive much publicity, the works by Albers and Vasarely for example…

I cut back on daily spending. I bought few clothes and little furniture, I have never liked being encumbered by objects; when I went shopping, I chose what was least expensive; I put the money aside and when I had enough, I bought an artwork. Later on I was better off; I could afford to give a small sum to an artist each month. At the end of a year or two I would go and choose a work. This helped certain artists I liked to keep going…

In time I acquired a clear idea of the situation of Constructive Art. But I missed out on works that I still regret. One day I came across an Albers, it was expensive but I could have bought it; I didn't do so for trivial reasons: there was some work to be done on my flat and I didn't want to go into debt. I don't know why I was reasonable that particular day. If I had reasoned in terms of investment I wouldn't have hesitated. Five years on this work would have cost five times its price and I knew it. But buying works of art is an activity that obeys its own particular logic… There was another time at the FIAC, when I saw a Geer van Velde, a watercolour at the limit of abstraction and construction, a small work close to a Morandi. Morandi is a painter that Guy and I liked a lot. If he had been a figurative artist, Guy would have been much influenced by Morandi… In short, I had the opportunity to buy this van Velde, I wanted to think it over; when I returned the next day, it had gone. The following year there were no works by van Velde. You have to be bold and not retreat when something appears patently obvious.

Naturally, there were a few crucial stages in the constitution of this collection. First, the meeting with Guy, without whom nothing would have happened. Perhaps I would have collected but I wouldn't have had the guiding line or the same tenacity. With him I looked, I went to see, I was curious about everything. Guy guided me… In 1969 the Mondrian retrospective at the Orangerie in Paris was a second great moment. Going from room to room following the progress of this purifying process was a revelation and seemed like a programme for life… And finally the *Repères* adventure with Eva-Maria, Günter Fruhtrunk's ex-wife, made me discover many artists of the collection.

Eva-Maria was a friend of Guy's. She participated in the creation of the association *Repères* at the beginning of the 80s, the purpose of which was to help defend Constructive Art in France. She knew the scene well and especially the German milieu, thanks to Fruhtrunk. She was to be the artistic director of the *Repères* group until it was dissolved, and I was the general secretary. Some artists have been exhibited by *Repères*; a large number were refused. The association's collection (more than a hundred works) and the archives have been given to the Musée des Ursulines in Mâcon. We had chosen this museum because of the dynamism of its curator, Marie Lapalus, and because the

museum had been acquiring works by Constructive Art artists for several years: an oil painting by Max Bill, a homage to the square by Josef Albers, an *Au commencement* by Aurélie Nemours, an Albert Gleizes, a Marcelle Cahn were the most important… My role in the group *Repères* enabled me to develop my eye. I learned a lot from rubbing shoulders with artists that I wouldn't otherwise have met. The true ones, I believe, could be defined by their stubbornness in believing in themselves, the keeping intact of a sort of hard kernel within themselves. The eternity of the artist is like a peach, an artist I knew used to say, the flesh is soft and can rot, there are the pangs of suffering and disappointment, a sort of ruin, but at the heart lies a hard stone. The artist intuitively understands this and feels it. As do those who have X-ray vision. The real collectors have X-ray vision; that, I believe, is what is called *having an eye*.

You've noticed that I like silent works; I like colour, I need it, but I prefer whites, greys, quasi monochromes. A few artists figure among the silhouettes that make up my inner world: Antonio Calderara, Eve Gramatzki, Hans Steinbrenner, Alan Reynolds, Douglas Allsop… They have become friends… There are other great artists I am close to and that I have not known: André Heurtaux, Josef Albers… Others that I have met, and sometimes frequented, who are famous and whom I don't like, good artists but schemers… And less interesting ones, who will not be remembered…

Some names inevitably stand out more than others. Faces and personalities. Antonio Caldera first and foremost. Perhaps because he liked Guy and Guy considered him to be a friend and a master. They met at Denise René's at the beginning of the seventies; Guy acted as his interpreter which had brought them close together. Calderara exhibited Guy's work in his foundation a few years later. I met him shortly before he died. He lived in a large residence with a courtyard surrounded by buildings, not far from Lake Orta that could be seen from the terrace. A part of the house, the finest building, would become the main site of the foundation. At the time, he lived with his wife. Then life itself became a sort of museum, which is good and sad at the same time. You see these armchairs from the foundation catalogue? I sat in them with Calderara and Guy. Calderara's wife had prepared a cake and tea. She was nearly seventy and looked as she appeared in the portrait that he had done of her when she was thirty. An enigmatic figure… Calderara is undoubtedly one of the artists who impressed me the most. His works are among the inner landscapes that I prefer. The one I possess is a pale yellow line that blurs into the air saturated with white: a distant sun that would not rise, as though over the lake. He was, it seems, greatly influenced by the light of the region which he had grown up and lived in…

I would like to possess more works by certain artists. Calderara, so little known in France, is one of those artists. There is a photo that shows him behind a frame, as I saw him the first time, a distinguished man with a well-trimmed beard, a thick moustache, a warm concentrated look in his eyes. He was talking to Guy; I couldn't speak Italian but I could understand it. A lot of people knew me in this light, listening and not speaking. Now I am asked to speak and it's life itself which comes back, all I've listened to, heard and seen. On the day of this visit to Calderara, we had hardly arrived when Leinardi, a young painter at

the time, telephoned. He was seeking advice from the master, he'd had enough languishing in Italy with no response produced by his work and wanted to move to Paris with his family. Constructive Art is not an easy path to choose if you want to build a career quickly and earn a living. And what would he do in Paris, asked Calderara. No one was expecting him in Paris, his work was inside himself, with himself, and leaving wouldn't get him anywhere; it would no doubt do him more harm than good… I remember Calderara's voice, its conviction, its determination and serenity. What he was saying was relevant for me too, it was an invitation to use one's self-discernment, to listen to what was profoundly buried in one's self. The voice of a wise man. Both as a man and a painter, Calderara was an immense voice.

This collection is an ensemble of voices. A collection is like an orchestra that one tries to form to draw closer to a certain unity, a harmony. There are great voices and lesser voices but which bring a colour, a background and thus a density to the whole. Not that the great voices need to be set off to advantage, they can become soloists with no difficulty, their tessitura is perfectly in tune with the ensemble. What can one say about works that manage to cohabit with no other works? The great works complete each other harmoniously. At least so it appears to me.

Eve Gramatzki has a special place in my heart. I knew her well and I regret her tragic end. Recently I came across these postcards that she sent me. She was a small, elegant woman, slim, dry, with a handsome bearing and who wrote with this rather fine and cramped handwriting that you see. She wasn't an easy woman to get in contact with. She lived like a recluse in the Cévennes. Here is a photo of her house, surrounded by hills, in a wilderness, miles from any habitation. From time to time she would come to Paris, where she had a studio in the 15th *arrondissement*. On the seventh floor. It was from there she jumped to her death. I had lost sight of her since Guy had fallen ill. I hadn't known how to hear her message. She had sent a word after Guy's funeral; I didn't get in contact and I'm not proud of myself. I had supported her a little, financially, for two years. "You know how much it helps me," she said. I had a sort of accounts book in which I wrote down what I gave her. After a certain time I went to choose a work in the studio… There are other postcards. Replies to those I sent her, deliberately chosen to intrigue her. A dialogue between the two of us… This one: the view of a district in Hamburg, a small arrow shows the studio she had when she was a student at the school of Fine Arts. "It's there that I was born as an artist, André," she wrote. "One will have built from what one has lived; but I want to see the future: the vegetation and the South of France. Thanks again for helping me." Could I have guessed? She had a following that was loyal to her. It was summer; at the Père Lachaise crematorium there were only a few close friends and relations.

… Gramatzki didn't say much when she was in her studio. The only sound to be heard was the scraping of the chalk she used in her works, woven on brown or grey wash drawings like tapestries; barbed wire seen through fog… Penelope or a prisoner, she provided a glimpse of the enclosure of solitude and expectation through these trembling movements transcribed on paper: a hesitation, sure of itself, in which appears a silhouette of evaporated tears…

Paying a visit to an artist is a special occasion. I'm very attentive when I set foot in a studio, even if I don't look at everything; I go towards the artworks. You know when an artist loves his work, when he is wrapped up in it. You can feel a presence other than that of the artist. And then seeing an artist take out his work, who has the confidence to show what he does, is a great joy. The physical presence of artists standing before their work is often revealing. I saw Guy in the course of his life showing collectors round his studio, I know what a painful, maddening, humiliating or very reassuring experience it can be. Often after a visit I found him in a sorry state… The artists I know dread visits to their studio, they are distrustful. They don't always know if they're not going to let someone in whose look is destructive… In general I don't say what I don't like, it's not worth it, or I say so choosing my words carefully, because I know that my gaze, when I am surprised by what I see, needs time. Sometimes, when you feel sufficiently in harmony with and close to the artist, you can make comments on the weaknesses that you identify; but it's rarely the case. Visiting a studio is the great experience in which your doubts and convictions are confirmed. It's the moment when you discover what is alive in the artist, what is in the offing, what is waiting, what is dead…

Opening one's studio is more risky for an artist than exhibiting one's work. Even if exhibiting means laying oneself bare and accepting reproaches, criticisms, disdain and scorn. It's a risky venture but it is the only moment when the artist can know who his work speaks to. If a few people show interest, even one person, that's already a good thing; it's reassuring. Some have difficulty in facing up to this exercise imposed by their profession. However the worst thing is not to be shown at all. I'm thinking of the fallow years of Günter Fruhtrunk, Jean Legros, Aurélie Nemours…

Visiting some artists is like entering Aladdin's cave. And, if I may venture to say so, the caves I prefer are caves full of emptiness. It's difficult to express what one feels in the almost nothing. The work of some artists is too strident, and when it cries out, I close my eyes. Everything comes from the work and from the quality of silence that great works have. Sometimes, and not that often, you want to be a friend of the man or woman…

Living with an artist is an enriching and trying experience. Guy was a tormented soul. He was a prey to anxiety. Even if his painting is serene. Serene? It's not the case with all the artists I know. It's true that art must disturb but in a way that leads us to a clearer vision of ourselves. The works that I find unappealing in general are the projection on the canvas of a form of personality with which I feel no particular affinity. I don't like the feeling that the artist has not gone beyond himself in his work; when you have the impression that his worldly self is too present, when you see him in his art as he is in life. The artist introduces into his work what is deepest, doesn't he? The invisible figure that can be distinguished in true works of art.

Here is a photo taken during the evening following the ceremony in honour of the *Repères* donation to the Musée des Ursulines in Mâcon. There you can see Hans Steinbrenner and Guy de Lussigny. There are Alan Reynolds and Guy. They met during the dinner and got on very well. They are very merry in the picture, no doubt a bit tipsy. They both appreciate good wine. Guy was not ill

at the time. Reynolds was still in good health. I went to see him in England before the exhibition of the collection. I visited artists to complete my collection before the donation. He lives in a small house in Kent. His work touched me enormously: his grey chess boards and his reliefs in their white settings, like the imprints of huge seals on the snow. A single-minded working of grey and white.

A lot of artists admired Guy's work, even before he reached his full potential in the last phase of his work. It was when his activity with Denise René came to an end that he truly found himself. He left as soon as his material situation allowed him to. He had been preparing himself for more than thirty years. He was not an unknown artist, his work remained permeated by that of Klee, Kandinsky, Severini and Herbin of course…

One afternoon, André decided to show me Guy de Lussigny's last works. "You have to see them. To write, you must see everything. You can only put it across if you have felt it." *When he is organizing a hanging he first puts the works on the ground.* "The good works, he said, can be recognized when they are placed on the floor. They are not shown to their best advantage, and you realize fully the measure of their strength." *André handles the canvasses with care, unwraps them attentively, speaks of the fragility of the stretchers of a canvas, of the woods used, of the colours. He retightens a canvas. Taking great care. He evokes the questions of framing. Fashions change, you have to think long and hard to find which frame is best for the works. It's a task he enjoys immensely.*

… The first time I laid these works out around me, I had the impression I was in the choir of a church. People speak of the spirituality of Guy's work. It's striking in these works. He claimed to belong to no church. Some of his paintings open up a space: reason is suspended; it's a prelude to contemplation. I believe his work never appears to be so musical. They are small paintings, he no longer had the strength to accomplish large formats. Ten or so variations that bring to mind *The Art of Fugue*. On each canvas, there are five or six squares, blue, yellow, red, on a very simple staff. No sign of the juggling that one sometimes comes across in his previous gouaches or his watercolours, just a poised light that strikes a balance with the colour: one feels that his gaze is keeping its distance. These paintings to my mind are the expression of the lucidity of a man facing death. Guy was painting his testament and he knew it. The chemotherapy had been stopped; the only treatment he had was to relieve the pain. They are serene canvasses, whose musicality is perhaps less baroque, if baroque is the right term to qualify the work of a painter of restraint like Guy, who exploited the quasi monochrome.

The ideal situation of course would be that future donations of Guy's work give an idea of his development: the fifties when he was influenced by Auguste Herbin, the sixties and seventies, from 1973-1975 and up to about 1990, and after. And then show other little treasures: greetings cards, collages, paintings with gold and silver leaf. I have had the works presented at Colette Allendy's in 1959 restored: stills, broken forms with warm, bright colours, orange, meadow green and royal blue: *The Sorceress on Fire*, *The Alchemy*, *The Prison of the Self*… These early works done when he was young will be given later. You find the same inspiration related to the period as with certain artists of the Constructive

Art group, Auguste Herbin and Aurélie Nemours in particular. This work from the fifties follows hard on the heels of studies and experiment: objects, portraits, abstract studies, preparatory gouaches… For the executor of the will that I am, the problem is to know how to sell off certain works to pay for the restoration and framing of older works; and to choose those that will have to go to public collections, those which are representative of each period, the best examples. It's a conundrum.

I have also had some surprises. This little dossier for example… I'll show it to you… the whole set of the gouaches exhibited in Italy by Calderara: variations on the red and yellow. The square is already omnipresent. That exhibition could be put on a second time one day. Lussigny by Calderara. I already have an idea for the poster. I couldn't make the trip to Vaciago at the time, I would see it displayed at last…

André turns over these gouaches like the pages of a book. Guy used to paint a lot when they were on holiday in Italy. Hundreds of paintings in portfolios, tied up with their black ribbons. Large gouaches in which squares appear, tranquil monads, with a pale yellow, amaranth purple, deep purple or green-tinged background, which would bear witness to some vision of emptiness, which reached its paroxysm in the white gouaches, painted throughout the last thirty years of his life. The painting perhaps of a form of solipsism.
To compare it to testamentary works, moving as in an ambulatory erected around us, André produces a canvas from the fifties: View of San Gimignano. *A silhouette of cypress trees on a hillside; parallelepipeds tumble down in disorder in the light. Blues, a red stain, yellows, the same colours as those of the end.*

Guy had discovered San Gimignano in the fifties. We had a lot of friends there, Italians and the regular visitors. Sergio Manzi in particular. I've mentioned one of his drawings that is hanging in our home in the South of France… Guy had seen the works of Sergio in a restaurant, I believe; they got on and remained close friends. We went for long walks together around the village; we talked of the hierarchy of the angels in the paintings of the artists of Sienna, and of the war, Mussolini, politics… And in the plains of Arezzo, an almost lunar landscape when the harvest is over… Arezzo is Piero della Francesca, another great artistic revelation for me, with *The Flagellation* in particular, discovered in Urbino, a small picture with its perspectives and construction. We went off on various jaunts together, I was the driver of these gentlemen; they were always talking, we got caretakers to open the small churches… the joy of travelling around with an artist who speaks about the world and the art of other artists. The ideal of a certain happiness… I liked Sergio's wife Alma a lot, and her cooking; and Giaco the wrought-iron craftsman with whom Guy spoke for hours on end about the technical aspects of working with wrought iron. Giaco, a small dry man, all muscle, full of the joy of life, who used to sing me his air from Giordano's *Andrea Chenier*, when we went to see him… he too died of cancer… I arrived a little after Guy in Florence, at the end of the morning by the night train: he came to meet me. We went to *Armando*'s to drink an Americano, standing like the Italians do at the bar. The other pleasure was the lasagna *al forno*. Always the same dish. Guy used to say that it was the only thing I could say in Italian; he was right but it was a ritual. Afterwards, we would go and eat an ice-cream in the *piazza* sitting

on the terrace of the café. The beginning of the holidays… If they can be called holidays. Guy would paint one or two gouaches every day.

He had been working on the square for years. The influence of Albers in particular, and Malevitch. The appearance of an obsessive theme in a work is a fascinating phenomenon. The moment when a work imposes its own limit. Understanding or seeing the beginning of the road one must take, taking it out of necessity and advancing: going to the end of one's distinctiveness. The longest part is finding the beginning of this path, in the hope that it will lead far enough to exhaust this force which, if you don't get rid of it, poisons, deforms, kills. The serenity of Guy's works is not mysterious; he wanted people to feel a sense of calm when looking at his pictures. He wanted to induce a state of contemplation. Other painters have had the same ambition. It's the desire of someone who is profoundly uneasy. You only have to look at the photos towards the end of his life, they reveal in an astonishing way the face that I recognized when things weren't going well. Only painting brought him peace…

Discussions for whole afternoons with André. Rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île. Quai aux Fleurs. At the tavern on the island where the waiters and the owner knew him well: "Hello, maestro," they would say in a gently mocking tone. We'd have a drink. We'd talk of old friends, of the famous people who live in the area, of chance encounters, of gallery owners who put on exhibitions by Guy de Lussigny and other artists from the Repères *group. Each time there was a touch of nostalgia. For André Le Bozec they were halcyon days. Now things have changed: there is a time for everything.*

I've collected the works of many artists who belonged to this movement. I want to give preference to some of the artists I like most. Essentially those who belong to the same family as Guy: a restrained strength which assails neither the eye nor the senses and bears witness to a great mastery and fragility. Such are the painters I love: Calderara, Agnes Martin, Morandi rather than Nicolas de Staël or Bacon…

My ideal has always been a stripping away, but time is necessary to attain bareness without marring one's nature, without generating frustration. Artistically I caught sight of the ideal one day at the FIAC: in the corner of a stand there was a group of three paintings. I said to Guy: only these paintings and nothing else right up to the end. There was a grey canvas by Albers, a large format, 80 cm by 80 cm no doubt; a Ben Nicholson, in a beige grey, and an Agnes Martin. To which I would have added a small Calderara… but all that was much too expensive for me. Moreover many of the works I own have become prohibitively expensive. No matter, those that I couldn't afford have taken up their place in my imaginary museum… I have never resold or exchanged works to purchase other ones; very rarely did I regret my choices; I have perhaps been disappointed by the evolution of such and such an artist who has become more commercial or less creative than I thought was the case. I have never been disappointed in retrospect by the works I have acquired. If I had had the means, I would have made a lot of "mistakes". Desire and lack have fashioned my way of seeing.

Collecting means affirming one's identity while at the same time forgetting oneself: letting oneself be permeated by the universe of other people, reading oneself in other people's work. Forgetting oneself to such an extent that in the end this self-forgetting becomes a strength: a collection is also a self-portrait… It appears, so I have been told, that this makes the charm of this collection: one is not overwhelmed, one can breathe, one is not in the world of multimillionaires or of exorbitant auctions, even if today some of the works are valuable; one is in a personal museum, this collection is nonetheless me. I have shown a lot of people around the exhibition. These works no longer belong to me, I needed a lot of time to really distance myself from it. But I've managed it. When I am there and I have time, between the various problems with the administration and other people, I watch the people pass. Few of them take the time. No doubt one has to know how to pass by, but also to stop, to sit down and look. To let oneself be shown by the works themselves what they are, and for that one has to remain silent.

I quickly feel the quality of artists. I manage to pass on the message, but I can understand that people are sometimes baffled by the lack of matter. Such is the case with the stark quality in the work of Brandt, Calderara, madé or Reynolds. Some may find that there is too little but I need the spare simplicity of the drawings of an artist like Brandt. With his almost bare scores, one listens to silence: a few sticks of green, blue, red, five or six pairs of black sticks on the white canvas… And I need the weight of a Steinbrenner. It's not easy to talk about his works. He is very close to me. I can *see* him in a way that I have difficulty in defining. His stele-sculptures and his doors the colour of old burnished bronzes… sombre interlinked rectangles… mute questionings… I must also mention Friedhelm Tschentscher who I find very moving… and his polished stones, stranded like capitals from ancient churches or, as you can see on the wall here, this very clear grey trapeze, almost white, a paper-relief broken by a ridge. In his studio, the first time I thought I recognized the fin of a solitary being on the ocean. It's the vision I have of him. I admire this man, handicapped since childhood by polio, who wrestles with stones as with angels…

In any case the density of the bareness is perhaps brought into being by what has been removed, by what has disappeared in the process of elimination, but which has left a still visible trace and draws us in. Such it is with simple men who have stripped themselves down, of great constructions made with lines that are almost bare… I am happy when one can say of an artist at first glance, despite the bareness, or because of it: it's him. Then there are the tastes and the colours, as people say; you can't impose constraints in this domain. If you show what you see, you will occasionally manage to communicate not what you see, but something. During the visits I accompanied, people preferred some artists to others. Five or six out of forty. It is reassuring that the neophytes, who don't know the prices or the market, are drawn to the best works. That people, who say they know nothing about this sort of art but take the time to look, should see the interest of certain works proves that they are *true* works. What surprised me was the defensive reflex you provoke when you impose a monumental and resounding work; people are troubled, sometimes impressed, but they often change their mind. I am one of those who has always steered clear of theatricality.

I wanted to surround myself with works that I love. They don't have to be representative of the artist; I have not sought to own the best works of artists or those which are most characteristic of such and such an artist… As soon as you do something, inevitably, you must expect criticism. And then there are the missing names. Artists I don't appreciate and those whose work I couldn't buy. In any case a collection does not claim to aim at some sort of closure. In the best of cases through its lacunae it bears witness to the infinite diversity of the spirit…

… And then everything is so fragile… These works require great care when they are stored away. I pack them in bubble wrap. Too often the stretcher frames are handled roughly, they are slightly buckled; the ravages of time don't help: the knocks, the scratches, and they are tainted by flies. The conservation of works is a real problem. Gallery owners, museums and private collectors don't always pay enough heed: this grieves me, makes me so sad for the artists when I see their works soiled or warped. Having lived in close intimacy with an artist, I know what pain and what a sense of revolt this can produce. I can't help thinking of Guy when I see works that have been neglected or damaged. Even if it's part of life. The protection of art works is sometimes the result of chance, nothing much, a piece of luck or an oversight. When the artists are gone, when their heirs do not look after their work, what happens to it? So many works of art across the world have ended up in the dustbin. At best the buyers deal with them, with all that implies for trends in the market. Generally they take no risks. One has to wait until the works come into fashion… and then, what state are they in…

And in the tone of his voice, there is sorrow and the pain of the pious man whose faith is not respected; of the child whose little world is scorned, ignored or maltreated. There remains in this man the part of childhood that art preserves and that is particularly apparent when the works he loves are in jeopardy.

People talk of my detachment. I love the silence of religiously-minded people with no religion, and the speech of silent people, but I am not a monk. The proof of this is my attachment to the works I intend to hang at home when I will have started my new life. My new life. I'm more than seventy. I think I'll leave the flat in which we lived together. I'll have to draw up a list of what I will bequeath to various people, to the public collections, if they accept what I leave them. Thinking of death is a source of life, especially when you have the possibility to reassemble and to organize what you have loved before dying, what made up our life, what still does. Of the career there is almost nothing left, of life's numerous encounters not much remains, of what we possess nothing follows us… But before passing on, to fill oneself with coherence and meaning, knowing that one will remain destitute and alone in the worst hours of one's existence; to gather together what constitutes us, not to get intoxicated by it but to detach oneself from it: to feel one's deep unity in order to die better, this is the never-ending challenge…

… It's not having anything to do that people find disturbing. In day-to-day existence you can take life as it comes. When facing death you feel yourself slipping away like sand falling from your hand. Finding something to do and

catching what seeps out of oneself to uncover its unity. Even if you do nothing except under threat from guns or exterminating angels…

Perhaps Guy's example and his love of Montaigne still guide me. Guy didn't collect pictures, he had his painting, but he owned a few old editions of Montaigne. He read him every day. An hour or two. He had frequented him since he was young and when he fell ill he turned again to this old friend. He would stretch out in his studio upstairs on the small couch near the window from which he could see the Seine. He would read with his back to the light so as not to be distracted by the boats going by. He had few visitors, it was difficult for him to endure the long conversations and the presence of those who didn't know what was going on, to whom he had to, if not explain, at least play a part he was too tired to play. He could accept Montaigne's words: his voice is soft, without impetuosity, it is true and dense, it doesn't tire, it consoles and pleases… Guy watched himself die. He read a great deal; in any case, you have to keep your mind busy, and stop it from wandering off and leading you to regions of terror. You have to keep your anguish under control. Guy has always had to struggle with this anguish; he sought an inner discipline which helped him to do so. That's part of his painting too… At the time of his last trip to hospital, he didn't bring his Montaigne with him. On each occasion, in times of emergency, he used to take an edition of the *Essais* with him. Did he have a premonition? The next morning I went to visit him. He turned his face to the window when I left. I had hardly got back home when the hospital phoned. It was a fourteenth of July.

He would have liked to have been buried in Montaigne's village. In the end, he returned to Cambrai, with his parents… Guy didn't want any flowers for his funeral. He loved white roses, it was part of our shared language. At the church on his coffin, there was just a square formed with white roses. In homage to Guy. In homage to the square, a whole life's work.

… What would Guy have wanted? It's a question I have often asked myself. He thought I would do things for the best. Today I am happy that the collection is coming back to the town where the artist because of whom it was realized was born. I have also stopped thinking about what he would think of what I am doing and how he himself would have gone about it. The enthusiasm expressed on seeing the exhibition by people from all walks of life has reassured me a little… It may well end up being a far more important project than I could ever have imagined. The prospect of a museum of sacred and contemporary art, adjacent to the present museum.

The need to encounter other works, to meet other artists, does not become less pressing. My own work is proceeding. I am moving towards a paring down of what I have done, and the result is, I believe, a greater density. I would nonetheless like to preserve a link with the past: it will be my *cabinet d'amateur*, and my little chapel. I will carry out my experiments there and surround myself with Guy's pictures, with those I have never had the opportunity to live with. The spiritual quest is a quest for density, it was Guy's path; I have the impression that his death has made me quicken my step on this path.

This new collection will be an experimental space for a few artists who have succeeded and who still keep on working, who take risks: quasi-monochromes, whites, greys above all, even if I feel the need for coloured works: a blue composition by Vacossin, a work by Navrot. Without speaking of the space I put aside for the discovery of unknown artists of course. Once again in order to create the conditions propitious to contemplation. This is what I have never stopped looking for all these years: surrounding myself with works which bring me peace and lead me to the edge of this *je ne sais quoi* that I keep pursuing…

The affection with which André speaks of artists and their work is very moving. It is rigorous too: rigour guides this sharpened blade that opens the eyes like shells ready for an offering. He is looking for density and has learned, unconsciously, to discover it. A mystery oblivious of itself–this je ne sais quoi*–that brings out what is dense and which in a work of art forsakes authenticity to embrace contingency. The implacable, sometimes imperceptible, limit which makes one pass from seduction to disappointment or, on the contrary, from indifference to astonished clarity.*

I've learned a great deal while thinking about the hanging of these works in the museum in Cambrai. The great lesson to be learned when different artists are confronted is that a certain number stand out. The best ones are rapidly identified. One ought to collect, even if it takes years to realize it, four or five artists. This is the privilege of forty years of looking at art. I've had my fill over the years and now I want to cut back. It's the logic behind a life which has an ever finer edge. When you are twenty you can't act like this, it would be the sign of a closed mind, it would betray a lack of curiosity, but now I can focus my mind… Like madé's sculptures, which erect whiteness in wreathed columns, nameless stem posts… Like Reynolds's reliefs, Brandt's works, or those of Steinbrenner… I always quote the same names, they are artists who, to my mind, have gone the whole way, not to the end, for on the road to paring down one never stops going further along the path towards subtleness and the infinitesimal… This movement is like a groundswell caused by Guy's death and which carries me off, beyond, I don't know where. More and more I want to unburden myself materially and to be lighter within myself. Thanks to this donation I have separated myself from what could have entrapped me in my memories, and have made something which surpasses me. And it's necessary to reflect on what can still be achieved, to go even further. It's a privilege to turn what one has accomplished into a gift and to pursue the same path, freer and more serene. To stand back and look behind oneself compassionately on what is not repudiated, but on what one has detached oneself from…

… What explains this impulse I don't know. And this desire to discover other artists of renouncement?… Living in proximity with certain of their works is a passage. I like the idea that they become part of the intimacy of a man before embellishing a museum, I have the impression that they have been fortunate enough to live and not to be placed straightaway far removed from daily existence, far from common events. I am simply the trustee of what I collect. I buy and I give, a collection of works ripens in me, I possess it from inside and detach myself from it. Possession implies dispossession, doesn't it? I am only a ferryman. There are works which I am very attached to, I prefer to see them in a museum; it's their rightful place, I won't live for ever. And then I am

attached to them because of memories which aren't necessarily linked to the work itself, which is why for those works which must find a place in a museum I know how to acknowledge the priority of their everlastingness. It's just as well to arrange things now while I'm still alive. Who knows what will happen after? And to make the most of the enthusiasm created by the donation, and what will come of it all, I hope, in the coming years. To know how to dispossess oneself in order to transform what one is deprived of into a work which constitutes what one truly is. Even if I don't forget that each work (or nearly) is a piece of my story with artists, of my life with Guy…

I am fortunate enough to feel something infinite within me: the possibility of no longer being in a state of inactivity or absurdity, and to resolve in part the question of the meaning of this life that carries on. Assembling this collection has enabled me to embark on a journey that I would perhaps never have undertaken with so much rigour and so serenely if it hadn't have been for the art. Giving this collection will have allowed me to understand this. The logical sequel to this voyage in the world of Constructive Art, a long, very long, voyage of initiation in a sense.

So, why stop now?… With Guy, we never stopped discovering. Sometimes I'd had enough. Travelling with him meant taking all the little roads to visit isolated churches, chapels which weren't mentioned in the guide books whose existence he knew of God alone knows how, ruins that someone suggested we go and see. Before we met each other, Guy had moved around a lot. In Italy of course. He went to see what he thought was indispensable for his artistic education. He was an incredible autodidact. He spent a summer in Rome visiting all the baroque churches. He wanted to know, even if it involved a direction he didn't intend to take. He travelled to Mexico too. Over there the Mayan and Aztec temples impressed him greatly. The religious baroque to a lesser degree. He crossed the United States from south to north. The roads and the museums. Europe too… How could I stop discovering now? I have accompanied him as much as I could.

Of course I've been surprised by the impact of this donation, a response which helps and encourages me. I know how much I owe to the artists and to Guy, I am aware too of what I brought him. Guy and I did not form a perfect couple. We stayed free, preserved what was essential. He was not an easy man; he was touchy, taciturn at times. When I found him with his pipe lit and the room full of smoke, I could be sure that Monsieur was in a state of self-doubt; the evening was not going to be amusing. He wasn't sure of himself, I was; but the conviction that one has about someone is difficult to transmit, especially when it's someone close to you, and anxious. I didn't always feel up to the task in hand, he was an intellectual and for many people, too intelligent and cultivated, his vision went further than that of other people. It took me a long time to realize that we made a balanced couple. I needed to believe this was the case.

The new collection again leads me towards him, towards the artists he loved: Tschentscher, Brandt or Steinbrenner; as well as madé who he discovered late on … madé is one of the artists whose work I feel happier and happier living with. She was one of the last artists presented by *Repères*. You know her. Have you noticed her hands? I love artists' hands, I love their bodies and their

presence before their work and when they are with me, when they are relaxed, when they have forgotten that I am the collector who has come to visit the studio and buy, or enrich his collection; I love when they forget their interest or their anxiety, when they don't feel threatened by my gaze… I am thinking of meetings with Andreas Brandt at his home in Germany or with Douglas Allsop in England… Sometimes it never happens. Certain artists in my collection who are still alive have only given their work, which is already a great deal. But when there is this added humanity, this generosity, then I am enchanted… It's the case with madé. Visiting her in Burgundy is a joy, a delight for the taste buds first of all because she is an excellent cook. And then it's a celebration of the spirit and of sensibility. It's a joy to see an artist who doubts, who is seeking, who never stops questioning her work. You grow in her presence. Her questions and her inner rhythm drive you on. She is one of those artists I want to move towards. There is something of the Cistercian in her, an almost radical quest for simplicity. Her quest overwhelms me, who am not an artist, she revives in me the desire for nothing, never attained, always pursued… You walk a lot with madé. Behind her house, there are fields, bare in winter, covered with rape in spring, with wheat in summer: the flat tints of colours, yellow, green, brown; our conversations about artists, Jean Legros in particular has left his mark on her, and other artists who have now disappeared. As madé says: "this collection and these works summon up the souls of many dead artists, one finds oneself among the living and the dead"… We walk on again. In the distance you can see the spots of light on the fields, on the hills; the mud clings to the soles of your shoes in winter, you can feel the sound of the wind, the cold, the sun and the special language of the bareness of a landscape which focuses one's attention and invites introspection; and this presence emanates from all around, from the earth itself. According to madé, one can't grasp her work without having seen the fields she loves to walk in, and that she loves to photograph. It struck me the first time; it's a plain over which the spirit breathes. A few artists in whose work the spirit blows, a few close friends, that's what one needs to carry on.

When he answers the phone, I know from the tone of his voice that he is not speaking to someone who owns a flat in the building and is asking for advice, but to an artist he knows. Satoru, madé, Contreras-Brunet, Palà, someone else. His mood changes, is mixed with joy, respect and complicity. He lives for his friendships. He has for their works the consideration that one has for precious, holy objects; which gives his manner of handling the canvasses something ceremonial; and it's a complicated ceremonial to make up, in the middle of pictures that he produces from all sorts of places, an ensemble which benefits each work and provides it with its most suitable adjacent work. With his rolled up shirt sleeves, he spares no pains. He wants to give me an idea of this other collection that he might propose to a museum. He carefully removes the sticky tape, unfolds the brown wrapping paper, lays bare the stretcher, then seeks out a place to hang the picture in the cluttered studio. Artists meet up whose canvasses he places next to works by Guy de Lussigny that have never been exhibited. "You must see everything, I told you so. Otherwise you won't understand. An artist's life is complicated and simple at the same time. A path that also leads to the void."

I listen to this man talking about what chance has shaped in him, without his being aware of it. There is something fascinating and questionable in trying to perceive the coherence underlying what he recounts, a coherence which no doubt arises from the need in the face of death to find one's unity before abandoning oneself.

André returns to his strategy of trial and error, to the solitude and the difficulty of seeing how to achieve the best results. The man is demanding, perhaps inflexible, he says. He applies a simple rule, an alliance of personal sensitivity and a strict formal direction. A rule that gives form to the tangible and aims at density. A classical rule if ever there was one.
We wander through his internal gardens for hours seeking out the finest choice of the works of Guy de Lussigny for a future donation; I can't help thinking of another arranger of signs and figures, he too, according to his biographers, a great collector and an accomplished man by all accounts: André Le Nôtre.
Now that I know him more intimately, I feel again each time we meet the emotion I had felt when I discovered the work of this man who walked round the museum and showed me his collection as he had done for others before me. We have become friends and sometimes I like to say what I hadn't yet said: "All in all, André, you are a fortunate man."

Translated by John Baker