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Gaillard, November 27, 1986

My dear Batuz,

Nowadays the artwork is born in a studio or near to it; things are no longer the same as in the age of the frescoes, which some may still yearn for. Art is in perpetual confrontation with its sisters. They complement and answer one another, bringing each other to life. That is why I like most viewing them in the midst of the disorder of their creation. Then they depart for the gallery: there they are smartened, framed, illuminated, celebrated, but everyone knows full well that all this is done solely with a view to selling them. Certain painters have difficulty resigning themselves to this fact and would like to keep as many of the paintings as possible for themselves: but one has to live on something. In this manner, the works embark on the course of their adventures, often an unhappy course: from collector to collector or art dealer in order in some cases to land in a museum. Even there they are not left in peace - assuming they are still alive - but are transported from exhibition to exhibition, from reviews to retrospectives. Often, the collector is searching for his choice: he wants to find his Rubens, his Rembrandt, his Picasso, and the director of the museum often does his utmost to follow suit. One wanders through various halls just to see a Bonnard, a Matisse, a Giacometti, a Miro, regardless of whether they are good or just mediocre, all that counts is to check them off on the list. And the complaints: but we could not find a Braque. This is why some painters tend to try and meet this demand, making sales all the easier to effect.

Anatole, Anselme, Antoine, Augustin all follow this pattern after their first success. From city to city I find the unavoidable Anatole somewhere between the Anselme who is serving and the Antoine who resembles all the others I have seen. The place is set for Augustin. Following his next exhibition, people will buy an example of his work from him that is hardly to be distinguished from those that are to be found every forty kilometres in some regions of the country. How boring if someone dares to launch a retrospective! For the pictures are already bored when they are in the studio, with the painter, just as bored, in their midst! But what luck for those pictures that loved one another! And if they were to be returned to their asylum it would be as if they had begged to be left together. What we lack are museums that differ from one another. I would like to be able to see different things here to those there, to see different painters and to be able to see them well. I would like to immerse myself in pictorial meditation on our times as if in the Arena in Padua, as if in the hall of the Schifanoia or the scuola di San Rocco. The more such collections there are, the more we will want to have still others, never satiated, rejuvenated with each visit. This is why I welcome your undertaking and all those that are planned in such a way.

With my best regards,

Your Michel Butor

English translation by Jeremy Gaines