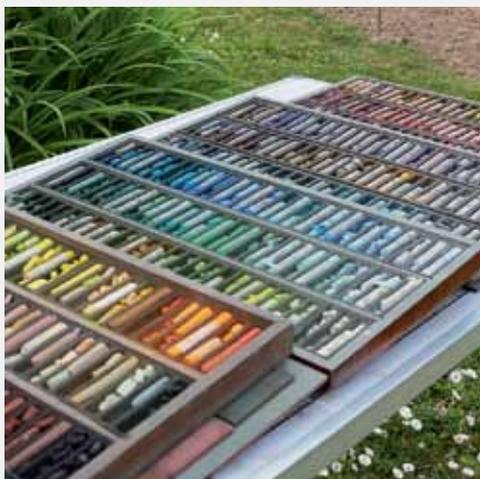

INTERVIEW



By Claude BRETEAU.



■ FROM CLAUDE TO THIERRY...

Claude : What exactly is a pastel ?

Thierry : Pastel is a pigment combined with a heavier element, clay, then bound by glue.

Claude : When we look at your materials, you can notice 5 or 6 boxes of colors that contain, I don't know how many different pastel sticks. About how many do you have ?

Thierry : Maybe 600, from 3 different brands.

Claude : And you need all 600 sticks to work ?

Thierry : I probably only use 20 of them at a time, but I need to be able to dispose of whatever nature has to offer and to be free to choose every possible strategy, because there are strategies in order and ambiance. It is not just a naive observation of things, with a cut and dried result. If that was the case, the readymade recipes found in art reviews would be enough to learn how to paint well, which is not totally exact.

Claude : Are you not telling us that when you work there is a chemistry, that you must combine colors, qualities and matter, perhaps ?

Thierry : Yes of course. There is the quality of the pigment, the hardness of the stick and the way of setting the pastel to obtain, with the second layer, an overlaying that will not blend with the first layer. So, all of the successions allow you to elaborate a strategy... A whole language !

Claude : And this varies according to your mood and maybe your subject ?

Thierry : It depends on the season and the lighting; with a shadowy lighting and cool temperatures, I tend to use blue. In calcareous spaces, you use yellows from Naples so that the light on the stones stand out.

Claude : The idea of setting the pastel allows you first to reinforce what exists and from there you are able to do overlaying ?

Thierry : Yes, first in a technical manner, by spraying a fixative, thus sealing the first layer to make sure that the second layer does not blend with the first. We obtain an overlaying with richer and cleaner result. This is one of the basic approaches to my work. The first layer sets the foundation, an atmosphere, and the second one helps to define certain things, perhaps leading me elsewhere.



Claude : That means that when you create a pastel, you must set it several times ?

Thierry : Yes of course, I set it 5 or 6 times. The overlays are a central part; They are the history of the painting, written little by little. It highlights the opalescent nature of the pastel, translucent like porcelain, between transparency and opaqueness. I apply these layers on laid paper. Nowadays, many pastellists use very specific supports like « *artspectrum and pastelmat* ». These are rough type papers on which they can do very little overlay and sometimes without setting. I find this process interesting, in the sketching state, but it never leads to this « *textured* » work that I chose and that allows you to go further in the painting adventure.



Claude : When we see you setting, it seems almost rudimentary !

Thierry : I always set with a mouth sprayer. Students from the Beaux-Arts call that a bottom blower. The fixative that I use almost doesn't darken the colors; it is a quality product that I have only found at *Sennelier*. I buy one liter bottles, which is my cheap side coming out (laughs).

Claude : You are a talented pastellist, recognized in your art, why have you chosen pastel ?

Thierry : Pastel is a world, a material, a quick fix, spontaneous, that allows you to go very far into nature and in a minimal time. That does not explain why I chose pastel, but having tried it, why I never went back.

Claude : You have never been enticed by oil painting for example ?

Thierry : I sometimes wanted to, but, since there are still so many things to look for in pastel, things that I haven't yet found, I stayed with pastel. I have explored watercolor painting before, one day maybe I will try oil painting. For now, there are still too many things to discover in pastel.



Claude : And how does drawing fit into all of that ?

Thierry : Drawing ? Ah ! I love a beautiful drawing, I like the perspectives that are elegant and realistic. I like elegant and baroque forms, for example, I like Italian sculpture.

Claude : From the XVIth century, from the Renaissance ?

Thierry : Yes and the *BERNIN* as well from the XVIIth century.





Claude : In the *BERNIN*, there is shape and line. As for you, we have the impression that in what you do, the shapes prevail over the lines, right ?

Thierry : Not exactly, but if the forms coincide and create lines within their boundaries, it is a pure joy of expression.

Claude : So, there are no boundaries between the two, it all works together ?

Thierry : Exactly. For example I like those draftsmen that never lift their hand, whose gesture and stroke are one continuous movement. It is a sign of coherence.

Claude : When you are in front of your subject, do you plan to recreate what you see or what your inspiration dictates ?

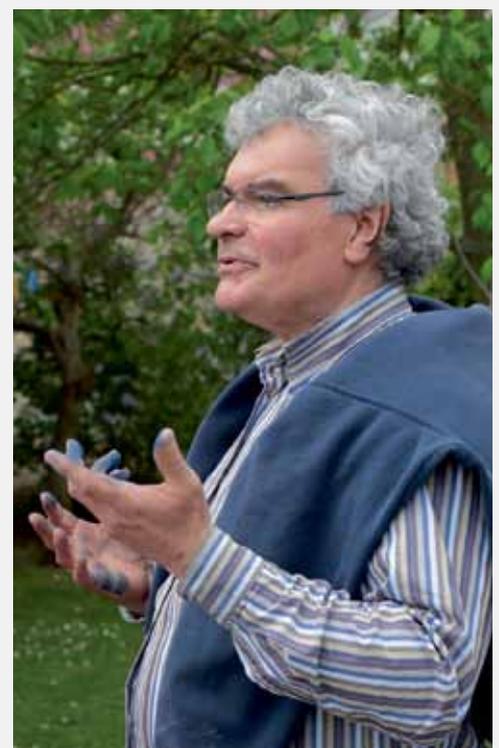
Thierry : It's chemistry. I believe in what some painters called, in the middle of the XXth century, the poetic reality. It is like a bridge between what I see, my own culture and knowhow. From there, a type of recollection, an amplification of what I see. This is it, the chemistry of the art... However, you must have a good vocabulary to express yourself.

Claude : This vocabulary, can we assimilate it to experience ? How do you describe yourself compared to your beginnings ? What did your years of experience teach you ?

Thierry : I ended up concentrating myself on some subjects that I approached 35 years ago but that, perhaps, I did not explore enough. I had gained in knowhow but the subjects of preference hadn't really changed; I had always liked the shafts of light gleaming between rows of trees and a beautiful architecture in the background. Also with characters that come and go, and lots of children playing in the background.

Claude : And yet we don't really see living elements in your work ?

Thierry : Yes, I like to include them sometimes, but they might not be the main elements of the composition. I am not a portrait painter, but I like characters that fill the space. When I was just a teenager, I liked *Claude LORRAIN's* paintings with his small characters distributed throughout a huge landscape and the taste for this never left me.



Claude : Does that mean that mankind is inferior to landscape, to nature ? That man is a part of nature but that we don't have to dominate, that man is not the king of nature ?

Thierry : Man is not the king of nature, he is just part of it. But I do not agree with those who say that we are only members of an animal kingdom, condemned to be ruled by the jungle of an almighty nature.

Claude : Do you believe in Man ?

Thierry : Yes, I still do ! It's better that way.

Claude : So here you are making a composition of blue, green, and yellow. We are in your garden and obviously it is not representational.

Thierry : Generally, I go for abstract patches, large abstract stains that little by little will become organize to do create something closer to reality. I never start from a drawing. I start with a large unbridled abstract composition and I gradually organize it.

Claude : Alright, and this might be a stupid question, but why these blues ?

Thierry : I am using the blue to bring out the purple of the iris that is in front of me, it is the blue and the pink together that will support the mauve color of the iris. There you go, that is a strategy.

Claude : That means that there is a whole vocabulary of colors ?

Thierry : Yes, I especially believe in the relativity of colors.

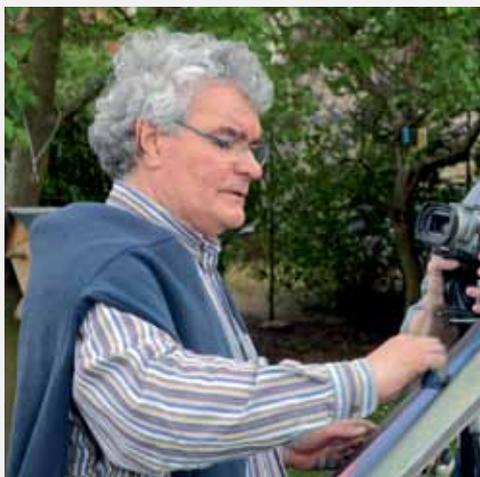
Claude : What do you mean by that ?

Thierry : It means that a color is only worth its environment, on the side, below, by the touch and the texture of the color; at this very moment it takes all its richness, but if you want to reproduce a color exactly as you observe it, you will never be able to.

Claude : To reproduce what you see you don't want to copy, but you want to translate it.

Thierry : Copying is a bore.





Claude : Interpretation is not art ?

Thierry : There was a painter named *Maurice HOURDEAUX*, he lived at Milly la Forêt and, he used to say : « *You want to copy, take a good camera or a copy machine you will go faster* ». It's true that is the problem of the invention of photography compared to painting.

Claude : How do you combine painting and being a teacher ? It is not the same thing at all ?

Thierry : I prefer being a painter, and in the beginning it caused me some trouble. Then the problem resolved itself through public demonstrations where I finally realized that having a group of 10 students behind

me, ends up not being an inconvenience. On the contrary, their presence brings a surge of adrenalin. It is comfortable to be installed in the secrecy of your studio but it is exalting to be like an actor that wants to be on stage.

Claude : Do you like the idea of passing on your knowledge ?

Thierry : Yes, I do. Maybe it's an old-fashioned cause since so many people believe in the spontaneous generation today ? But there are more and more amateurs that need to learn and seek it out.

Claude : There are fads, where people have a tendency to erase the profession by saying : « *I follow my own inspiration, I want to be myself* ». But it might take time to become yourself.

Thierry : It is a problem that is not easy to deal with. It is obvious that a knowhow is necessary, it takes grammar and language. We need to tame our own desires before really getting into it. But it's true that if we only have the knowhow, we won't get far.

Claude : That may be the true difficulty for a teacher, to pass on a profession, to advise, without pushing your student to follow in your footsteps ?

Thierry : This is the reason why I started public displaying. It is living art. It is not a regurgitated book knowledge. We are facing reality. I put myself in danger, I can put my back to the wall but at the same time, students have the impression that is living art. So, they are attracted by it, they go for it. It is not really easy to explain.



Claude : When you have a student in whom you detect a particular desire to start pastel, what is your approach ?

Thierry : I have to say that they are more and more pastellists. You can see by the number of pastel shows multiplying in France, it is very encouraging.

Claude : And how do you explain this evolution ?

Thierry : There is a rebirth of pastel because we have probably ignored or neglected this discipline that gives beautiful results.

Claude : Among your students, are there any that come from oil painting, watercolor painting and that place pastel among other techniques or that become adept ?

Thierry : Both, but for me, I like pastellists that come from oil painting and that will one day return to it. Pastel is painting and we are very happy that it is painting, dry painting. Italians call it that in their language. I am delighted to expose in mixed disciplines. It is always very interesting to confront yourself with others and get out of your comfort zone. I was lucky enough to be invited to a watercolor painting festival at Brioude last year and I was very happy there because I was diving into another world.

Claude : When people ask you « *I want to get into pastel, but what should I do first ?* », What do you tell them ? By what do we need to get started in pastel ?

Thierry : I try to take one for the team. I show them, like today, and I put them to work right after. Very few give up even if many struggle, but none of them feel left alone and little by little it falls into place. I even add in team work. In front of a pattern, outdoors, everybody is on equal ground and out of the comfort zone of a studio and book knowledge. There is still much to be said about the adventure of painting, of the intimacy of the painter and his subject, that can be contradictory with the notion of teaching, that is outgoing, and at the same time the special mystery between the artist and the subject. At that point, we surprise ourselves and say : « *Well, I have taken this road, and I would have never believed it, but, in fact, I was right to dare to take another path* ». While saying that, it made me think about *Philippe LEJEUNE* who said : « *In painting, you buy a plane ticket for Valparaiso and you land at Timbuktu* ».

