



Natasha Krenbol

In this world we walk
On the roof of hell
And look at the flowers

ISSA KOBAYASHI (1763-1828)

HARD TIME BLUES

A painter and a drawer, Natasha Krenbol belongs to the generation of Jean Dubuffet's children - or rather grandchildren - but also to that of poets like Henri Michaux. A generation which, in contrast to its more sedentary, tutelary fathers, has travelled widely, and which under every sky and on every continent, has opened out the doors of perception.

Drawing inspiration from the roots of the blues, jazz, and the traditional music of all the continents, she is among those artists whose global culture and mixed blood seem to contain the memory of every vanishing ethnic group: one in a family of primitive and cosmopolitan poets who belong to the larger family of endangered Mother Earth. Her works draw their inspiration from what is commonly termed the "Third-World" and from contact with countries where life is simple and resources often scarce, and where genuine social relationships, can still be found. No wonder that her works should open frontiers, which in her opinion, should have disappeared long ago.

In the process, another mental life became familiar to her : "Objective chances", signs, encounters form a web that makes everyday life mystical in an age when life itself is surreal. For the painter, as for the poet, everything can become a medium of clairvoyance. For these enlightened seekers, the "naturally stoned" wonderfully hypersensitive and in a state of super-receptivity, art is bound to be almost hallucinatory or else it just isn't.

For anecdote's sake or for posterity, Natasha Krenbol, a being of many names (sometimes Totopiok, sometimes Ayàt, B Flat, Ayala, Adela Bindu or Nyamkamati *the one that returns to the origins* in the Venda language), is a half-etheric figure who came into being in Zürich. She then disappeared with her dog, she has been spotted in Ivory Coast, Morocco and London, before a brief appearance at the Paris School of Fine Arts, then reappeared here and there, in French Guiana, Africa or California.

Sometimes associated with Turks, Japanese, or Pygmy poets, and at other times with Congolese writers or South African flute players, she has temporarily set up camp in the concrete of Paris's northern suburbs, then in Ardèche, and today on the banks of the Drôme. For her, painting is total commitment, a way of life, of breathing, as is music that accompanies her everywhere.

It is precisely these different moods and combinations that she invites us to discover in her vibrant paintings, where everything dances and moves — an entire culture that she carries with her wherever she goes, much like a traveling storyteller carries his personal mythology. A chorus of small characters, looking as if they have been drawn by a child's finger in the condensation of a window pane, or with the stroke of a sponge on a freshly wiped milky blackboard : Totopiok's art has no dimensions and it projects itself just as easily into the infinitesimal - a postage stamp - as the infinitely

great - long banners rolled round a bamboo stick, like the Japanese *kakeshiku*. Such art is the art of all nomads, forced to hide their world under their bed, a mobile art for our barbarian times, when great empires, made of stone, begin to totter under the assaults of migrations coming from all quarters.

At the beginning of the last century, "l'art nègre" (black African art) exerted an influence over artists in a formal and rather external way. There is no trace of exoticism in Krenbol's Africa, an inner Africa which reminds us of the time when, according to palaeontologists, all men were black. When, a mere species among all other species, they established magical links with all the dimensions of the cosmos. Animals, plants, human beings, imaginary creatures, all beings are of equal merit in Krenbol's universe, where the small and the great are of equal importance in the eyes of the Creator. One senses a particular tenderness for the one thousand and one small, essential details of contingency, which form the miracle and the charm of existence. It's a universe where natural animism prevails, where life runs its course, at its own pace, stubborn and obstinate like the donkey, Totopiok's favourite companion.

Man is a player that struts and frets his hour on this abstract stage against a graffiti-like background. Moreover, it is here perhaps that resides the secret of what gives so much life to these works : the superimposition of at least two worlds, two concerns, at variance and at the same time complimentary, just as in life. Here, poetry rediscovers the space of free expression, and one senses the freshness of an unfettered and talented improvisation : one which knows how to, as in music, combine the feeling, the talent and the very particular sense of balance that great living artists develop by dint of warding off blows from all sides.

There will be no denying the fact that Krenbol is a poet, but she is a poet with a cause. A poet in the sense Henry Miller gave to the word when he wrote: "I do not call poets people who write verse, with rhymes or without, but rather the man who is capable of profoundly changing the world". (*The Time of Assassins, an essay on Rimbaud*)

LAURENT DANCHIN

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1978-1982 École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris
 1985-1986 Kala Institute, Berkeley, Californie

solo exhibitions

2023 Librairie-Galerie Chant Libre, Montélimar
 2018 Manufacture des Tabacs, Université Jean Moulin, Lyon
 2016 Corporate Headquarters Santé vet, Lyon
 Galerie Alpha, Thiers
 The New Courthouse, Lyon
 Galerie Autour de l'Image, Lyon : *Alabama*
 2014 Grand Hôtel de l'Univers, Saillans
 2013 Galerie Alter-Art, Grenoble
 W.S.M. (The World's Smallest Museum), Aucelon
 2012 Théâtre Am Stram Gram, Genève
 Musée de la Création Franche, Bègles
 2011 L'Orangerie, Montéleger : *Animal spirits*
 2008 Maison pour tous "Quatre montagnes", Villars de Lans
 2007 Galerie Prise de tête, Romans
 2005 Galerie Artactua, Le Mans
 2000 Am Platz galerie, Eglisau, Suisse
 1999 Galerie Jonas, Petit-Cortailod, Neuchâtel, Suisse
 1998 Galerie d'Origine, Lyon
 Altstadt galerie, Berne, Suisse
 1997 Altstadt-halle, Zug, Suisse
 Trubahus galerie, Azmoos/Saint-Gall, Suisse
 1995 Galerie Avantgarde, Mannheim, Allemagne
 Galerie Michel Lagarde, Paris
 Trubahus galerie, Azmoos/Saint-Gall, Suisse
 Galerie Jonas, Petit-Cortailod, Neuchâtel, Suisse
 1994 Musée Adzak, Paris : *Alabama*
 Galerie du Ressort, Paris
 Galerie Hamer, Amsterdam
 Galerie Bad Schinznach, Suisse

- 1991 Galerie Art'o, Aubervilliers : *In Harlem streets*
La Petite galerie, Paris : *Hall of ancestors*
- 1986-1994 Her India ink drawings are regularly published in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, *Le Monde de l'éducation*, etc. including *The Totopiok column* in *L'autre journal* and *Dada*, art magazine for children.
- Creates *The Totopiok*, main character of a tale (in English and in French, to be published)

group exhibitions

- 2024 Atelier Carcavel, Crest
- 2021 Atelier Carcavel, Crest
- 2020 Galerie Autour de l'image, Lyon
- 2019 Centre culturel Louis Aragon, Bourg-lès-Valence
Le Polaris, Corbas (Grand Lyon)
Galerie du Bourdaric, Vallon Pont d'Arc
- 2017 Galerie Jean-Louis Mandon, Lyon
- 2015 Galerie Autour de l'Image, Lyon
- 2014 Au Quai, Pont-de-Barret : *Pli*
- 2009 Grand Hôtel de l'Univers, Saillans
- 2008 Le Belvédère, Saint-Martin d'Uriage
- 2004 Galerie Taoa, Crest
- 2003 Espace Saint Martin, Paris : *The Spring of the Singular*
- 2000 Prieuré de Manthes
- 1999 Funabashi City Gallery, Japon
Art Space Rashinban, Tokyo, Japon
- 1998 Outsider Art Fair, New York
Judy A Saslow gallery, Chicago
Halle Saint Pierre, Paris
- 1996 Altstadt Galerie, Berne
- 1995 Galerie Hamer, Amsterdam
- 1993 Musée de la poste, Paris : *Artists'stamps*
Site de la Création Franche, Bègles : *The gardeners of memory*
- 1991 Musée de la poste, Paris : *Children's counters*
- 1990 Musée de la poste, Paris : *Mail art, first impressions*
Galerie Pixi & Co, Paris : *Scarlet red*
- 1988 Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris : *Landscape : urban and suburban parks*, indian ink drawings, published in *Cahiers du CCI* (Centre de Création Industrielle), published by the Centre Pompidou