

(à) Ciel Ouvert

The Paradox as visual Program

by Arslohgo



Arslohgo. „(a) Ciel Ouvert“, digital Transformation. 5940 x 4200 Pixels. CMYK, 300 ppi

The title alone makes it clear what kind of work we are dealing with: a calculated double strike of language and image. “(à) Ciel Ouvert” — the parenthesized preposition is no typographical accident, but the very hinge of the entire work. Without the à, one reads: open sky, ciel ouvert, the expansiveness above the Breton coastline. With the à — and the eye slides inevitably into the parenthesis — a second layer of meaning is activated: à ciel ouvert, the open-pit mine, the gouging of the earth under open skies. Arslohgo’s lohgorhythmic methodology is not ornament here — it is foundation.

What the work depicts is correspondingly precise in its ambiguity: a bucket-wheel excavator — that titan of lignite strip mining, the embodiment of industrial earth-wounding — hovers, or founders, in a sea of clouds. The steel behemoth rests neither on spoil heaps nor on torn-open ground. It sits on cumulus clouds, as if gravity had capitulated, or as if the sky had drawn the machine toward itself in order to pass judgment.

Visual Structure and Color Dramaturgy

The composition operates through a vertical tripartite structure. In the upper picture space, a deep blue-gray cloud mass looms — heavy and unsettled, with an atmospheric density that evokes the large-format landscape photography of the Düsseldorf School, without appropriating its cool detachment. The middle register belongs to the bucket wheel itself: its massive arched frame traces an almost complete circle, an industrial O, a hollow eye through which one looks into the darkness of the machine's interior. Scaffolding, walkways, pivot arms, conveyor belts — everything is visible; no veil of aestheticization drapes itself over the mechanics. And yet: the CMYK processing immerses the metal in a cool blue-gray that detaches the machine from its industrial brutality and lends it something archaic, almost sculptural. In the lower third, finally, lie the white, soft clouds — an almost cynically tender bedding for the monster.

This color palette — steel blue, ash gray, the broken white of the clouds — is not neutrality. It is a decision. The warmth of the earth is entirely absent. No brown, no ochre, no earth tone recalls the ground to which such machines owe their existence. The earth has been erased from the image — and it is precisely this erasure that constitutes the work's most powerful rhetorical gesture.

The Sublime and its Price

The art-historical reference that asserts itself most forcefully is that of the industrial sublime — a tradition running from the nineteenth century through the industrial photography of the twentieth, linking fascination with technological gigantism to a barely concealed sense of the uncanny. Arslanoglu cites this tradition, but rewrites it. By detaching the excavator from its terrestrial context and placing it in the sky, he performs a surreal displacement: the machine that operates *ciel ouvert* — that opens up the sky by tearing open the earth — now finds itself in the sky itself, rootless, displaced.

There are no workers in this image, no operators, no victims. Only the machine and the clouds. This emptiness is oppressive. The bucket-wheel excavator appears as a relic, something stranded — not triumphant, but exposed. One might speak of nemesis, were the word not too theatrical. Arslohgo is shrewder: he leaves the ambivalence open. The image does not indict — it exhibits.

In the Context of the Sky series and the Dinard Project

As part of “Motifs nuageux particuliers – Rétrospective Dinard 25,” the work carries within it its point of departure: the sky above Brittany. Dinard, the Atlantic light, the restless Breton cloud formations — these are the impulse, the photographic raw material. Yet Arslohgo does not leave it at the level of an atmospheric document. The Dinard material becomes a matrix into which layers of meaning inscribe themselves.

The SKY series, which unfolds the theme of sky on three levels — visual, textual, and sonic — finds in “(à) Ciel Ouvert” a particularly pointed expression. For this work does not simply deal with the sky — it speaks about the sky: about what human beings do with the heavens and with the earth that holds them up. The visual arm of the series here becomes political without becoming didactic — a balance far more difficult to sustain than it appears.

Conclusion: The Open Question

“(à) Ciel Ouvert” is a work that refuses to be a position. It is a question in image form — posed with the quiet authority of an artist who knows that the most effective critique is the one that leaves the viewer alone with their discomfort rather than resolving it. The machine hovers. The sky holds it. And below, where the earth should be, there is nothing but cloud.

Medium: Digital Composition