

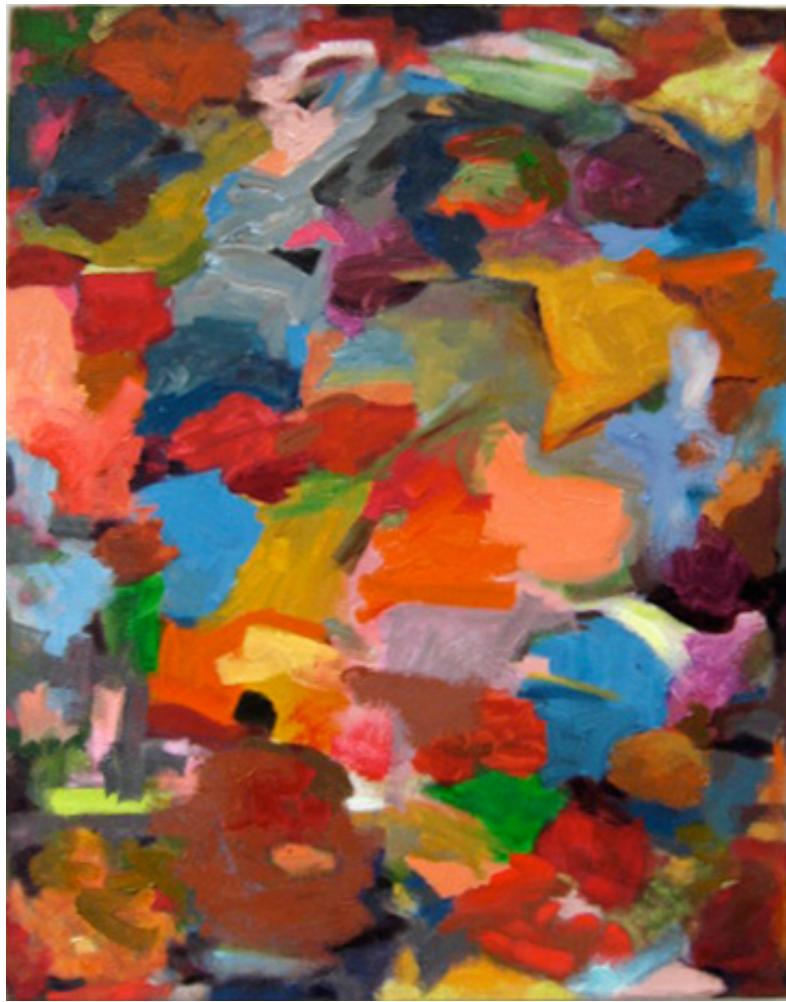
The Party



ALEXIS MARGUERITE TEPLIN AND PABLO LAFUENTE

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Undine or 'Girl Making a Dog Dance on Her Bed', 89x70cm

CHARACTERS: PAUL, painter.

ELSA, artist, designer.

LUDOVIC, philosopher, art critic.

UNDINE, PAUL's younger sister.

ACT TWO

The dining-room of PAUL's and UNDINE's house. Two doors, left and right, and a window at the centre, half open. A painting showing a still life to the left of the window. Early evening.

UNDINE. What time is it? They are late, aren't they?

PAUL. They'll be here soon. (*Looks out the window*)
They'd better be, or they'll get caught in the rain.

(*A few moments pass, and the doorbell rings.*)

UNDINE. I'll open the door.
Could you fetch a bottle of wine and some glasses?

(*UNDINE exits to the left, and shortly after returns with ELSA and LUDOVIC.*)

ELSA (*kisses PAUL on the cheek*). Thank you very much for the invitation. There is nothing better than a glass of wine and pleasant conversation on a grey Sunday evening like this.

PAUL. I cannot tolerate discussions, they wear me out.

UNDINE. Please ignore him.
(*To PAUL, shaking her head.*) I thought we had all agreed to meet and talk about art this evening. Please don't be so caustic.

(*PAUL pours himself a glass of wine, and sits distractedly on a sofa.*)

UNDINE (*to ELSA and LUDOVIC*). Would you like a glass of wine?
Please sit down and make yourselves comfortable.

ELSA (*nods to UNDINE and looks at PAUL*).

Paul, you're always putting up the same act.
It'd be refreshing if one day you gave up the cliché of the
temperamental, inarticulate, tortured artist and tried to
acknowledge how clear your ideas about your work are,
and how much you enjoy making others listen to them.

(*Pause.*)

LUDOVIC. Let's call a truce. A serious discussion about art is an urgent task. Today I read in a journal a text that asked a few worrying questions. Allow me to paraphrase: 'Why new paintings and new ideas? We already have too many old ones that we don't enjoy but that were foisted upon us by education and fashion,' it said.

On the face of those words, the only possible response is to keep on making art and to keep on talking about it.
It seems like, for some time now, serious art has been the work of isolated individual artists. Their work has nothing to do with the style or the needs of the masses.
They seem to arise rather in defiance of their times.

UNDINE. Are you suggesting artists should make work without thinking about who's going to see it?

LUDOVIC. Not so much so as to try to fight any expectations and demands that are not their own.

PAUL. For my part, I believe that a painter should always make a painting as if no-one will ever see it. That's the one and only way he should express himself.
Painting is a means to express oneself in relation to oneself; the pleasure to live with oneself; the curiosity that one carries within oneself, that one expresses with colours as others write to express themselves.

ELSA (*ironically*). That makes you a true romantic!

PAUL. What is the problem with that? Art's role is to do what



Elsa or 'Diorling, Darling', 32x16x16 cm



machines can't. Through my paintings I create forms that suit me, colours that suit me, a personal balance, in fact.

ELSA. The problem is to find out whether those forms may also suit others around you.

PAUL. (*gravely*). Nature is the guarantee. I attempt a piece of nature, which is the perfect work of art. Everything comes to us from it.
We exist through it, nothing else is worth remembering.

ELSA. Are you suggesting the mission of art is to copy nature? I'd rather say it is to give expression to it! Artists are not copyists, but poets. Otherwise, a sculptor would end all his labours in merely moulding women.
But try to mould a woman's hand and place it before you, and you will find a horrible dead thing without any semblance. We have to grasp the spirit, the soul, the features of things and beings.

LUDOVIC. (*laughing*). Elsa, that makes you an even better romantic! (*After a moment's thought*.) I'd identify the nature of painting elsewhere. Painting is the quintessentially optical, and it is only a visual art to the extent that it is so.
I would even say that when it's not optical it's not painting, it just uses painting's materials and conventions to some concrete end in which they themselves may or may not be critically implicated.

ELSA. Why that impulse to define? Always the same story.
Culture can't stand butterflies.
It must pin them down and label them.

LUDOVIC. I thought Paul was the one who wasn't keen on discussion.
There's no discussion without an attempt at definition.

ELSA. I guess you're right, it just irritates me when things are narrowly demarcated.
I am an artist and a model, I make sculptures and design

clothes, I am a woman and a political subject!
Let's complicate things, open up the possibilities!

UNDINE (*enthusiastically*). Beautiful words!
(*To LUDOVIC*) Can I ask you a question about what you just said? Why would anyone not want a purely optical painting?

LUDOVIC. Perhaps because it would distract us from something else, something that is better for us, more responsible, more engaged.

(*Lightning*.)

PAUL. But my paintings are engaged with, if I might use that word again, nature. I want to make art and nature the same.
Art is a personal apperception, which I embody in sensations and which I ask the understanding to organise into a painting. The landscape thinks itself in me, I am its consciousness.

ELSA. Ludovic might correct me here, but if you took your ideas about nature and understanding seriously, you should be interested in ornament and decoration, and not just 'proper' paintings.

LUDOVIC. Actually, I will correct you. That is not necessarily the case, ornament and decoration can never be purely retinal, they always point at some principle of reassurance, an idea, which is the opposite of the retinal.

ELSA (*shaking her head*). There is something sterile to that conception.
Even reactionary.

LUDOVIC. I would say the opposite. The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornamentation from objects of everyday use. Ornament means wasted labour and wasted health. I would like to formulate the following principle: the form of an object should last, that is, we should find it tolerable as long as the object itself lasts.
Ornament can no longer be produced by someone living

on the cultural level of today.

(*Pause. The window bangs in the wind.*)

UNDINE. What about beauty? Isn't art concerned by it?

PAUL. Beauty is a stern, uncompromising thing, which does not allow itself to be attained through reproduction; the artist must bide its time, keep watch upon it, press it close, and hold it fast to force it to surrender.

ELSA. First you wanted to find communion in art, now you talk of it in terms of struggle.

PAUL. Well, form is difficult to seize, only after a long contest can you force it to show itself in its real shape. The real painter must persevere until nature is driven to show itself, naked and in its true guise. You must wear out many brushes, cover many canvases, before you become a real artist.

ELSA (*sarcastically*). The artist as a wrestler, that is a beautiful image. As for me, I prefer to make art as if I was singing, without constraint, aiming for the maximum of intensity and exaltation.

PAUL. That is not what I meant. Think of an acrobat. He executes his number with ease and apparent facility. But don't lose sight of the long preparatory work that allowed him to reach that result. It is the same with painting. Hard work is the only way to attain beauty.

LUDOVIC. Focusing on beauty is a mistake, it can actually be a handicap. To continue with Paul's clothing analogy, an American philosopher has recently said that 'A young man can count himself rich if he has a brain in his head and a decent suit in his wardrobe.' If you consider the English and the Americans, you can see they expect everyone to be well dressed, while the Germans go one further and want their clothes to be beautiful as well. But they're mistaken – the point is to be dressed in such



Ludovic or 'Chez moi, n'est pas (Magritte)', XX cm



Paul or 'Venus and Cupid', 133x114 cm

a manner as to attract as little attention to oneself as possible.
Among the best people to attract attention to oneself is
considered vulgar.

ELSA. One man wants to trap beauty, the other do away with it.
It seems to me that beauty must be feminine because there's
nothing else for it to be.
I can admit that the change in the lives of women, their
increasingly active lives, provoked a revolution in female
fashion, making it perhaps less ornamental, more constructive.
But this move was influenced by painting, by its investigation
of colours, by its beauty.

UNDINE. Excuse me all, but I'm finding the argument hard to follow.
What is the relationship between clothing and painting?

PAUL (*condescending*). ... Ah... Enough of this.
It would be far more pleasant now to hear a song.
(*Tenderly.*) Undine, why don't you sing us something?

This text contains elements from Paul Cézanne, Anton Chekhov, Sonia Delaunay, Jean Dubuffet, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Adolf Loos, Franz Marc, Henri Matisse, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Elsa Schiaparelli and Friedrich Schlegel.
This is not a new idea.



The Party or 'Sex and Cézanne', 32x16x16 cm

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