L'art modeste est l'enfance de l'Art, le premier maillon d'une longue chaîne évolutrice ; il nous vient de l'ère paléolithique, appellation chère à l'écrivain et poète Joseph Delteil. Il se conjugue à tous les temps, englobe l'ensemble des expressions artistiques. Les chansons péjorativement dites « de variété », les mélodies et textes de Charles Trénet ou de tant d'autres... touchent au sensible, à l'intime, bien plus efficacement qu'un admirable poème de Baudelaire, même chanté par Léo Ferré, malgré l'immense talent de l'interprète et la profondeur de l'écrit, tout de même atteint d'un cruel pessimisme, amer, négatif, si désolant soit-il. *A contrario*, joyeux, l'art modeste est un cri Yéyé ! Décomplexé, sentimental, libre, c'est un art généreux, omniprésent, il colore les rues, fleurit les poubelles, étoile le quotidien, donne du plaisir pour quatre sous, laisse l'intellect en marge, joue à saute-moutons par-dessus les périodes des académies, tire des rires, des larmes, et parfois des grincements de dents (preuve qu'il ne laisse pas indifférent). Il ne prétend à rien d'autre qu'à s'étendre, conquérir de nouveaux territoires, car, tout modeste qu'il se dit, il est impérialiste, internationaliste, il envahit le marché. Pour ma part, il est mon langage d'enfant bégue qui, alors ne pouvait dialoguer qu'avec les objets, sans risquer d'être moqué.

Au départ, la disparition d'un être cher. Aussi naissent les angoisses abandonnantes.
De là, se loge la nostalgie, et ça rime avec névralgie, antialgie... Les objets deviennent des bouts de mémoire à recoller, font des petits... On vous classe collectionneur, puis à la fin, à court de mots, ramasseur (comme on dit dans le Midi, et qu’on prononce « ramasser » !). Puces, décharges publiques, rossignols d’arrière-boutique, sans compter les maisons des marniers, des tatinis... En déduction, ramasser à tour de bras des tonnes de matières émotives chargées d’affects, toutes ces chochoses voulées à disparaître, la fragile archéologie des années 1950-60, petits plastiques, petits cartons, petits papiers, et finalement les mettre en communication, en scène, en somme, les réinventer dans une nouvelle histoire, et ne plus jamais éprouver de mélancolie. Un long chemin, d’une objectothérapie parcourue à tours de roues de mo-bylette, médiétique, dépourvu de permis de conduire, contraint de trimbaler ces trouvailles accrochées au guidon, réservoir, porte-bagages, par n’importe quel temps, qu’il pleuve, qu’il vente, qu’il neige, qu’il crève ! Sur cette route voyageait d’aventure Hervé Di Rosa, l’homme à épuiser. Il fit Chevalier le motocycliste, et celui-ci, très honoré, l’élut Prince, et ainsi commença l’époque... e... e. Avec une foule de gens partie prenante, bénévoles, inclassables, et déclassés, copains copines, francs et franches camarades, citoyens, et cœurs valants, tous ensemble ! Tous ensemble ! Après le Verbe, sortit du sol le MIAM, le Musée international des arts modestes.

**DANS LA MUSETTE**

Les deux grosses musettes devenues insuffisantes, je metsais le surplus de mes pêches d’une abondance miraculeuse dans des sacs Casino, qu’à l’heure du départ des Puces j’enfiais au guidon de ma mob’. À propos de départ, ce dernier dimanche j’avais sur les jantes quitté le marché, avec un surcroît de mon chargement habituel, une table d’apéritif en forme de palette de peinture, et mise à cheval sur le réservoir, un shako de majorotte à poils blancs, accroché par les ju-
And then there was the MIAM
The story of a junk-picker extraordinary

Bernard Belluc, who founded the MIAM along with Hervé Di Rosa, collects doodads. He is a ramassaire, as they say in Provence, a picker-upper of stuff, for whom modest art is a language, a way of life and bighearted poetry.

Modest art is the childhood of art, the first link in a long evolutionary chain. It comes down to us from our prehistoric times, as the early twentieth-century writer and poet Joseph Delteil described his childhood. It appears, however, in every era and throughout the ensemble of artistic practices. The kind of music pejoratively labeled “pop,” like the words and melodies of Charles Trenet and so many other “variétés françaises” singers, touch our sensitive chord, deep inside, much more than a poem by Baudelaire, even when sung by Léo Ferré. Despite the immense talent of the singer and the profundity of the text, it is permeated by a cruel pessimism, negative and bitter, no matter how delectable it may be. Modest art, on the contrary, shouts “Yeah, yeah, yeah!” Unselfconscious, sentimental and free, it’s an omnipresent, generous art that colors the streets, paints flowers on trashcans and spangles our daily lives with stars. It offers pleasure for nothing, leaves the intellect behind, plays leapfrog over the peristyles of the academy, brings on tears and laughter and sometimes makes us grit our teeth in annoyance, proof that it does not leave us indifferent. It seeks nothing more than to spread, to conquer new territories, because as modest as it may claim to be, it is imperialist and internationalist. It swamps the market. For me, it is my language, as a stuttering child whose fear of being made fun of confined him to conversations with objects.

It started with the death of a loved one. The anguish of abandonment. In walked nostalgia, and neuralgia and analgesia in its wake. Objects became little pieces of memory to glue back together, and one led to another. They call you a collector, and in the end, for lack of any other words, a ramassaire (as people say in the Midi), a trash picker. Flea markets, dumps, rummaging through second-hand shops, not to mention the homes of grandmothers and aunts... In short, I picked up tons of emotionally-charged items, cute things not meant to last, a fragile archeology of the 1950s, stuff made of plastic, cardboard and paper, and then made them

Bernard Belluc is artist and collector. He is the cofounder, with Hervé Di Rosa, of the Musée international des arts modestes de Sète.

speak to one another, reinvented them, each playing a part in some new story, so as to never feel sad again. A long journey, an object therapy undertaken on a motorbike, mé-sigue (me) with no driver’s license, with no alternative but to cart around my little treasures hanging from the handlebars, gas tank, luggage rack, no matter the weather, the rain, the wind, the flat tire. It just so happened that this was also the road being traveled by Hervé Di Rosa, the man of my life. He made the kid on a motorbike a knight, and the kid, very honored, made him his prince. Then their epic adventure began, with a whole mob of people in the cast, volunteers, the unclassifiable and the déclassé, buddy boys and girls, pure comrades male and female, citizens and brave hearts, all together! All together now! After the Word, there arose from the ground the MIAM, the International Museum of Modeist Arts.

IN THE BAG
My two big haversacks no longer big enough, I put the rest of my miraculously abundant catch into plastic supermarket bags, which I hung from the handlebars as I left the flea market. When I left the market that Sunday day that particular Sunday, in addition to my usual load, I had a cocktail table shaped like a painter’s palette hanging over the wheels, straddling the gas tank a majorette’s hat with a white fur pompon tied by the chin strap to the rear view mirror, a stack of old copies of Paris Match piled on the luggage rack, and a gigantic (1.2 meter) fairground doll someone had been kind enough to strap to my back for lack of anywhere else to put it. I needed a push to get the motorbike moving. It tilted perilously to the right and left before finding a precarious balance. I moved forward slowly through the always crowded market, yelling “Watch out, don’t make me lose my momentum!” Looking at me amused, people got out of the way, while two disrespectful children and a mad dog ran after me. I had utterly failed in my desire to pass unnoticed for fear of arousing interest in the fruits of my hunting and fishing. Finally I took off. The breeze created by an incredible twenty-five kilometers an hour dried the sweat produced by all that emotion and the sheepskin jacket I wore all year round. True, the landscape went by slowly, but I was traveling. The main thing was not to stop, because I might not be able to get going again. Fearful of stopping for traffic jams, pedestrian crossings, intersections and red lights, I zoomed through them all. And then, malheureux, a disaster! After three kilometers my back tire blew out, boudiou! I zigzagged like mad for a hundred meters in the middle of Castelnau-le-Léz, Sunday morning, eleven o’clock, when everyone was leaving the church. A friend driving by with his family saw me, stopped, double-parked and took out his camera to take my picture. The last thing I wanted was to smile for my portrait. As to be expected, I didn’t have an air pump. On a quest for this indispensable tool I wandered from door to door on foot, ringing bells, with the monstrous doll still tied to my back, unable to take it off because I couldn’t reach the knots. No one wanted to let me in. Behind a second floor window I saw an elderly couple, probably hard of hearing, shaking their fingers at me in response to my sign language. There I was, in complete consternation, a guy struggling to describe a bicycle pump with hand motions that could be seen, even without a dirty mind, as the obscene gestures of a madman. The whole effect was obviously magnified by the presence of the doll, that strange plastic object on my back. I was saved by a gentleman washing his car; I found what I needed in his garage. Three strokes—pouf, pouf, pouf—and I was pumped up again. He pushed me, vas-y vas-a and I was off, wobbling crazily, with the cocktail table between my legs and the whole kit and caboodle. Two kilometers down the road, touffitouff, touff, puff... another flat. Let’s not give up all hope! In the middle of nowhere, paradoxically, it might be easier to get help. What luck, I said to myself. Today is Sunday, the day people go for a bike ride. Without another thought I waved my hand at the first cyclist I saw. The very model of a bike rider, safety yellow vest with fluorescent stripes, brown stockings, a model not included in my collection of miniature plastic bicycle racers. As soon as I waved him down my Tour de France hero hit the brakes. Nice! All two-wheelers are brothers. The man was as sensitive as he was sporting, pumping up the tire himself. Helpful to the end, he gave me a push and réavant! A few kilometers further on, I was to get yet another flat, flattening my morale totally, since it was almost noon. Lunchtime, and no longer a cycle to be seen...

Translation, L-S Torgoff

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