

american terms to conduct their daily 'Yiddish literature', he concluded, "is a figure among American Yiddishists. It is rarely...  
...the occasion of their culture was much  
...with a more complete than that of any  
...immigrant group before them, and the stakes of  
...employed for the occasion. Surely this is all

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FREELANCE

This is the time of year when the artists at Sacy-le-Petit have their end-of-residency shows. As usual, I receive from my wife a rail ticket from Gare du Nord to Pont Ste Maxence, meaning I am to be there. The house is crowded with artists, guests and itinerant gardeners. As they come and go, everyone has to shift rooms according to subtle laws of precedence. Every night there are high jinks in the attic. My contribution to the preparations is a little light hedging and edging in a prominent part of the lawn. I respond to the lunch bell dirty and sweaty, like the others, and we talk about art or gardening. Later, I might walk to the next village to buy a Camembert.

The arrival of one of the resident artists, Clare Iles, who works with rubbish, was timed to coincide with the monthly *collection d'encombrants* (cumbersome objects), so the village was decked with unwanted items, as if to welcome their would-be rescuer. My wife tried to get a financial contribution from the Communauté des Communes, but without success. As with many of her actions, you couldn't be sure it wasn't a conceptual work in itself. The reply claimed, wrongly, that the project didn't concern the community, thereby neatly rounding out the work's critique.

Clare tours the village like a wandering padre, pushing our old handcart before her like a mobile confessional. Though not strictly admissions of guilt – some of the carpets and kitchen fittings come close – everything that has been put out represents a kind of failure.

Look at that wall unit, that raffia lampshade, that ironwork lamp standard in the form of a seal. Clare absolves them all with the laying on of hands. Her technique is to rearrange the junk outside its house, then photograph it *in situ*. She might shift a cooker and fridge closer together, so that they look like a married couple posing at their gate, help a rejected partition regain lost dignity, or give life back to a toy frog. Occasionally, a villager will emerge and sombrely put his stuff back the way it was, rejecting her ministry. When the cart is loaded with selected items for her main installation back at the house, she trundles home and returns it to me for more mundane duties.

The cart, hand-made in the 1940s, is a work of art in itself. Ugly but personable in the manner of French cars, it has an air of peace and resolution about it, offering no criticism of one's efforts, even in the early stages of a chore, so that you feel good about yourself and plod onwards hopefully. The cart was always a symbol for me of the happier life I might one day lead at Sacy, if I could just put aside worldly things. I am happy, therefore, to see it recognized by Clare, who constructs her own "cart" in homage to it – a gaudy, flirtatious girlfriend for the elderly original. Identifying with the latter, I can't help thinking that our cart is still a virile-looking old chap. I park it close to Clare's installation and she says she wants it to stay

there in an honorary capacity. A moth-eaten mattress, now rain-sodden, is also part of the assemblage, and it is here that Clare sleeps out under the stars for the last few nights of her show.

Visitors could be forgiven for taking the installation for uncollected *encombrants*. They are even more bemused by the work of the other resident artist, Frenchwoman Morgane Le Guillan. This too is a satirical treatment of the village, but unlike Clare's mild-mannered critique of consumerism, it is a more cerebral, French vision of the village as a living body, a battlefield of infection. Laid out in the attic of the barn is an immense "carpet game" – a map of the village divided into as many jokily titled organic zones as there are plots of land: "tissus érectile", "zone de divertissements gastriques", "zone d'expulsion" etc. At each end is a pile of "men", green for villagers, pink for visitors, with which players are invited to compete for infection of the different coloured organs by outnumbering their opponents. It is a pessimistic metaphor. Visitors are ahead at close of play on opening day, but the result could turn around if the villagers show any curiosity at all (they usually don't).

These two "site-specific" pieces delineate for me the old problem of metaphor: how to make the intellectual, possibly true, possibly tiresome side of the equation burn off, leaving mystery and beauty. Le Guillan has hopes of a more complex interpretation of her work than the village as organism, prone to infection from within and without, but one needs the catalogue note to get it: "Pastel tints have a double edge: the inno-

cence of childhood, of candy and summer, resent temptation, while their sweetness: naivety symbolize the ambiguity of seduce and pleasure, for under their uneasy beauty a battlefield". Like Iles with her semi-abst Ben Nicholson-like photos of found objects Guillan wants to add the subtlety of painting the more limited preoccupations of concept art. But painting is elitist today; we must ta with the democracy of concept.

Back in London, we go to the opening year-long art festival in Southwark Park, Rotherhithe. Everyone invited is to be given a teddy bear, to be returned at the end of the year with photo of it and documentation explaining why the bear has been up to. For example, one is invited to spend a year at the top of a redwood Kew Gardens, another is going to the Himalayas. The one hundred teddies are ranged against the wall and we have to choose one. "Choose", my wife says, "I know nothing about teddy bears." I look at the bears, and, enough, after a while different expressions seem to emerge from their identical features choose the crossiest-looking bear and we bring him home with us on the bus. I say we should give him to our granddaughter, but then realize that it might be difficult, in a year's time explaining to a two-year-old why she has to give up her teddy, so that it can be part of "Teddy Bear Piece". A trauma like that could put her off conceptual art for life.

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