

Jennifer Flay

I did not know Jean-François Prat very well but he was, with Marie-Aline, among the first visitors to my art gallery on the 2nd floor of 7 rue Debelleye in the Marais district of Paris. The poorly-lit concrete staircase and the open wire-mesh lift of this industrial building of the 1940s were considered then as one of the “musts” on the map of emerging artistic creation. That was at the very beginning of the 1990s.

I did not know Jean-François Prat very well but his name was already renowned; a reputation so radiant that the expression “larger than life” was insufficient to describe him: that of a man of the Law who was reputed, respected, regarded with awe; he who, at the helm of the law firm Bredin Prat, manoeuvred successfully in all the major public takeovers of his time; that of an enlightened, eclectic and visionary art collector whose human generosity was infused with the values of his first battles in May 1968 alongside Marie-Aline: an art collector whose passion mirrored that which he nurtured for life itself.

When I met Marie-Aline in the spring of 2012, I came to better appreciate the scope and perennial dimension of this passion which was continually nourished, deepened and amplified. She was on her way to the TEFAF, the European Fine Arts Fair in Maastricht, one of the regular annual destinations of this couple who, while showing an exemplary constancy, never allowed themselves to be tied to any one taste, style, era or trend.

Like artistic creation itself, Jean-François Prat’s passion for art is one which lives beyond human time. Celebrating this, his partners and associates created the Jean-François Prat Prize in his memory. Like the man he was, the prize is exceptional in more than one respect: exceptional because its vocation is to encourage the work of emerging talents in the field of painting. Surprisingly, there are few prizes which reward the work of young artists who choose to explore this art form, born from the primeval creative instinct of man; an art form which has proven wrong the sempiternal prognostics of its imminent death by showing ever-renewed vivacity and vibrancy.

Following the artists shortlisted for the inaugural edition - Farah Atassi, the 2012 prizewinner, Gavin Perry and Lesley Vance - three artists have been nominated for the 2013 edition : Guillaume Bresson, Mathieu Cherkit and Matt Saunders. Each explores the multiple complexities of pictorial language: the interpretation of space, the construction of image, the relationship to reality, painterly gesture, materials, surface, historical perspective.

The participative nature of the selection process also endows the Jean-François Prat Prize with an exceptional quality. The outcome does not depend solely on the

decision of a jury of experts. It actively involves the law firm's partners and associates, calling on them and encouraging them to form an opinion. It is a prize that does not claim art as the preserved realm of specialists; a prize that liberates its public, legitimates its perception, militates in favour of the widest possible dissemination and pleads in favour of commitment: values which echo admirably those embodied by Jean-François Prat and the Law that he so brilliantly practised.

I did not know Jean-François Prat very well, but by deepening our acquaintance through the prize that bears his name - and of which I am the proud 2013 chairwoman - I am certain that he would recognize himself in it.

Born in New Zealand, Jennifer Flay is the Director of FIAC, international art fair in Paris, after having occupied the position of Artistic director since 2003. A graduate in art history, between 1982 and 1991 she worked successively for the contemporary art galleries Catherine Issert, Daniel Templon and Ghislaine Hussenot. In 1991, she founded the gallery who bore her name, representing, in France, Claude Closky, John Currin, Michel François, Dominique Ganzalez-Foerster, Felix Gonzalez Torres, Karren Kilmnik, Zoe Leonard, Christian Marclay and Xavier Veilhan, among others. In 2011, she was named Chevalier des arts et des lettres of France.