

# PASCAL CONVERT

## VOLE, CHEVAL À LA BLANCHE CRINIÈRE



“After the magnificence of the Château of Chaumont-sur-Loire’s central courtyard, you have to lose your way on the wooden staircases in order to get to the Château’s basements, as if you were making your way down towards a tragedy, towards a defeat.

There, in the basement of Diane’s Tower, in semidarkness, after crossing a room where the fragile ghosts of tree stumps from the Verdun battlefield sleep, covered with a layer of black ink, as if waiting to be burnt in the Great Salon’s fireplace in order to do away with the memory of the Great War once and for all, you cross time and head for an octagonal cell incised with diagonal lines, with a hole in their centre into which flowed the blood of animals butchered to provide the meals enjoyed by the princes and princesses who lived here.

As in the linear perspective of Renaissance architecture from Brunelleschi to Alberti, this dead end in the Diane’s Tower’s basement became the baptistery of blood: its only entrance is its only exit, the octagonal motifs on the floor and ceiling are mirrored on its walls, which preserve the memory of the blood that once gave life.

“Death does not concern you, dead or alive: alive, because you are; dead, because you are no more”, inverting up and down as is often the case in my works, eight silent, polished bronze bells, which should be in the tower’s belfry, float weightlessly above the floor in the octagon’s angles. In the middle, the ninth bell partly covers the cavity into which the precious blood flowed, evoking Christ’s death at the ninth hour. Set on the four tiled wall consoles where the butcher cut up deer and wild boars, crystal bells seem to be waiting for a quarter of venison.

Diane de Poitiers, who was deemed to be a skilled horsewoman and was often depicted as Diana the Huntress, died on 26 April 1566. A strange legend surrounds the cause of her death: malunion of a fracture in her right leg caused by a fall from her horse coupled with poisoning from the gold she drank every day in the hope of eternal youth. Levels of gold in her hair were measured at five hundred times higher than normal.

In the artisanal creation of bells, the craftsman uses strands of horsetail hair to turn the core that will eventually form the inside of the finished bell. They gradually lose their flexibility and solidify, so consolidating the core. By setting a horsetail on the “crown” of each bell, it becomes a head topped with floating hair. When Diane de Poitiers was exhumed during the French Revolution, her body crumbled to dust when it was exposed to the open air. But her hair remained intact. Although flesh is destined for corruption, hair remains eternal, awaiting the loved one in the cradle of this crypt of blood where only corpses spend the night.

Not far away, in the Château’s kitchens, the artist Jannis Kounellis’ bells take flight. Hung from poplar wood beams, they seem to be whispering an oracle. “Fly, horse with the white mane...<sup>2</sup>”.

**Pascal Convert, November 2025**

<sup>1</sup> Gérard de Nerval, *La main enchantée, in Contes, poèmes, souvenirs*, éd. Hatier, p. 109

<sup>2</sup> Deux souvenirs en mémoire : Jannis Kounellis, *Douze chevaux vivants* à la Galerie l’Attico, Rome, 1969 et Adam Mickiewicz, “En avant, mon cheval aux blancs sabots...”, in *Les Sonnets de Crimée*