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art au centre

Art au Centre is an art project with the aim of revitalizing the city center of Liège.

For the 18th edition of Art au Centre, from February 12 to April 30, 25 artists from Liège, Belgium and abroad present their works in 24 windows of empty stores. Painting, sculpture, installation, performance, photography, video... All current art forms are presented.

The exhibition map and the explanatory texts are available in french and english on the website www.artaucentre.be.

Art au Centre is an initiative of
Mouvements Sans Titre and Liège Gestion Centre-Ville.



In the windows of Art au Centre in Liège, Giuseppe Arnone displays a silent procession of four banners. Hung facing the street, they transform the commercial space into a place of contemplation and confrontation: what is shown here is embodied lives with no decorative purpose.

Two older pennants mark the beginning of his exploration of the banner as a plastic form and a tool of struggle. They communicate with two new artworks that were designed specifically for this urban context. Together, they highlight both the evolution of his practice and that of the world around him. As the aesthetic intensifies, the social climate hardens: the rise of the far right, the normalization of transphobic speeches and the questioning of fundamental rights.

The new banners, arranged in a semicircle, draw inspiration from ancient pennants, coats of arms and antique tapestries. Symmetries, borders and frontal compositions invoke the sacred and power, which are here subverted to convey other narratives. One reads: "Our identities are not theories. They are lived realities." and "Let trans people live, love, and grow old in peace." These statements affirm that queer identities are not abstract, but lived, shaped by fear, desire and hope.

The title *This Is Not a Theory* strengthens this idea: each banner becomes a manifesto, a banner of resistance. The deep red of the walls envelops the composition like a liturgical veil, sacralizing these lives while evoking blood, anger and persistence. The banner ceases to be a symbol of power and becomes a banner of survival, proclaiming loudly and clearly that these identities exist and must be respected.

Les envahisseurs**Dimitri Autin**, Saint Cloud (FR), 1995

Les envahisseurs is an installation composed of several assembled drawings, inflated with polyurethane foam.

The staging displayed here represents the subterranean, tentacular development of urban infrastructures: networks of tunnels, pipelines and fiber-optic cables that invisibly and systematically colonize our ground.

Through their emergence from the soil, like garden eels or hairs on the epidermis, the high-speed trains (TGVs in French) become a kind of parasite that take root in a world where machines proliferate to the point of breaking away from their original functions.

Brownfields extends Cesare Botti's ongoing investigation into the hidden infrastructures that shape the built environment. During his explorations in abandoned and demolished industrial buildings, construction sites, and infrastructural spaces, the artist collects discarded technical drawings, bureaucratic spreadsheets and construction plans. These papers, normally invisible to the public, precisely describe every aspect of the built environment, even before it comes to existence. Engaging with these fragments of reality allows the artist to access subjects like railway networks, production plants or electrical systems, structures of a scale otherwise inaccessible to individual experience.

Through oil treatment and perforation with office tools, these papers are rendered transparent and porous, and layered in order to make their marks blend and resonate. Disconnected from the original destination, their information overlaps and erodes, turning executive plans into drifting terrains. Detached from their original function, they are reclaimed as cultural objects, markers of a broader logic of planning, accumulation and obsolescence.

Installed in a shopfront vitrine and displayed using the visual grammar of real estate windows, the work stages a reversal: documents from behind the scenes are placed at the front, infrastructure becomes façade. By dissolving function into ornament, the work questions what's the relation between the language used for planning and the material world that it produces, and what remains of those signs once the described systems have disappeared, highlighting the tension between construction and erosion, progress and ruin.

Dirk Bours' paintings originate from his many forays through the urban landscape. Inspired by cities such as Bucharest, Vienna, Istanbul, London, Berlin, Madrid, Helsinki, and New York, he explored the structure of the contemporary city itself by capturing its form and composition, rhythm and materiality. Bours extracted fragments from photographs of street scenes, buildings, and industrial zones to transform them into paintings that exist between abstraction and figuration. At first glance, his work appears as an abstract arrangement of colors and geometry. On closer inspection, embedded elements emerge, for instance the hoods above traffic lights, revealing a sense of spatial depth.

Bours' visual language evolved from experiences as a graffiti artist, through photography and graphic design, still visible in traces of sharp lines, bold signs, and architectural structures. His painting process mirrored the city itself as an organic cycle of construction and deconstruction. He repeatedly built up, broke down, and reworked layers of paint, with each layer guiding the next. Like a city, his paintings were never fully planned nor definitively finished, constantly changing, shaped by accumulation and loss.

Rather than depicting the specific places he visited, his works resist fixed reference points, proposing instead a visual abstraction of the ongoing transformation of urban life. His paintings remain open, inviting the viewer to trace his decisions and revisions that structure their surfaces, preserving what a city erases.

One Loft Race – Pigeon Paradise

Lucas Castel, Bruxelles (BE), 1996

In November 2020, a new world record was set in the field of pigeon racing. Belgian pigeon New Kim was purchased at auction for 1.9 million dollars by a wealthy Chinese buyer at the prestigious PIPA (Pigeon Paradise) auction house.

Lucas Castel had the opportunity to picture this bird. This first photograph gave rise to a full imaginary that the artist sought to confront with a practice that developed in the Belgian and French mining areas, where he discovered a complex organization connecting professional and amateur pigeon owners who train their birds like elite athletes.

Over the past few decades, pigeon racing has spread across the globe, becoming a global and lucrative sport. This passion for homing pigeons has given rise to new competitions such as the “One Loft Races”, which pit many birds against one another toward a single finishing point, unlike traditional races, in which each bird returned to its own loft. The pigeon fancier sends one or more young pigeons to a foreign country, where the birds are acclimatized, fed and trained to take part in various races spanning several hundred kilometers, with recognition and great prizes at stake.

By questioning the evolution of a popular and local practice, *Pigeon Paradise* highlights our relationship with living beings in a capitalist society and in the age of the Anthropocene. *Pigeon Paradise* brings together a series of photographs taken by the artist between 2020 and 2025. In the course of this work, Lucas Castel also collected around fifty amateur videos of bird releases from around the world.

Cloakroom

Charlotte Delval, Roubaix (FR), 1996

Our gaze enters *Cloakroom*, a strange changing room where skins, garments or sloughs lean against the wall. These jackets adorned with engraved brooches form a collection entitled *Enveloppes*. They transform the intimate space of a partially opened pseudo-cloakroom into a place where acts of changing, exchange, intimacy and temporary absence become visible. In this installation, very little is fixed, except for the coldness of the metal of the brooches and coat racks, and a few needles and chains scattered throughout the space. Everything else is ready to fade, crack and wither, from skins to shoes with strange shapes arranged on the walls and floor. This cloakroom is strewn with small soap sculptures mimicking functional everyday objects, ready to be grasped or worn. It is a deformed, grotesque and monstrous collection of fragrant forms that the window prevents us from smelling. The sculptures play with time: daylight bleaches them whereas night calms them. The installation invites attentive viewers to pass by again, to imagine scents, chromatic variations and cracks. *Cloakroom* displays a game of slow observation of the aging of materials.

Charlotte Delval works with sculpture and writing in various forms (installations, objects, in situ interventions, readings, self-publishing and sound recordings). She tackles sensuality, the dirtiness of bodies and desire, at the edge of the living and the non-living. Her preferred materials are water and soap.

On “*Sexy Magico*”

Louis Gahide, Gand (BE), 2002

What is playing but not visible in *On ‘Sexy Magico’* are ten scenes from *Sexy Magico*, a 1963 Italian film that can be situated within Mondo cinema, a genre occupying a contested position in between documentary film and exploitation cinema — or rather: a genre performing documentary authority while staging spectacle. Relying on shock, taboo and nudity, the films extracted African cultural practices and distorted them for Western audiences. *Sexy Magico* openly markets its own exploitative appeal through the slogan “Shocking taboos... a film that will quicken the pulse and delight the senses!”. The question that follows is unavoidable: who was meant to be entertained and shocked by these images, and under what conditions?

Rather than attempting a critical reinterpretation or reframing, Gahide questions whether he has the right to intervene in this material at all. The intended audience of Mondo cinema is one to which Gahide, as a white Western man, could belong, and is therefore implicated in. From within this position, the installation turns back on itself, asking who is allowed to watch, speak, and represent.

To intervene in the footage would be to claim ownership over it; to show it again would be to participate in the same cycle of extraction and appropriation that produced it. So ultimately, Gahide chose not to show the film at all, a gesture raising broader questions about found footage as a political practice. The screens turned away are not an attempt to erase the colonial images but rather an attempt to disrupt their consumption. Absence here becomes presence — a space in which responsibility is made visible. *On ‘Sexy Magico’* does not offer a moral resolution, instead unfolding as a starting point, a question passed forward.

Paul Gérard's artistic practice tends toward a politicization of the intimate realm. Drawing on a series of testimonies and memories that are both autobiographical and deeply personal, the artist reveals the political impact on life stories. Halfway between reality and fiction, he draws inspiration from family narratives, which he deconstructs, transforms and sublimates.

After exploring grief, unsaid things and transgenerational legacies, Paul Gérard now turns toward childhood. He develops a narrative composed of sounds and images that questions how to put things into words differently. What precedes or exceeds language? *Rue Monroe, 62: La chambre L'enfant Le train* is inspired by his first place of residence. From an installation linked to the world of play, the artist explores the relationship between childhood and violence, and the ways children channel the images they receive: distance is created through play and the construction of an imaginary world. Using old toys once stored in a closet on rue Monroe (Kapla blocks, a train set, cars, figurines), he stages a miniature city crossed by a model train. The immersive, visual and sound installation invites visitors to enter the bedroom, a place of refuge, and to "board the moving train." The model city, along with a soundtrack, resonates with emotions: to desolation responds a vital energy; destruction gives way to a hope of reconstruction. The bedroom, an isolated space, crystallizes the tension between refuge and confinement. Immersion offers both a return to childhood and a distancing through fiction.

Installation with sound piece (voice: Estelle Saignes)

Straddling cinema and sculpture, *Vous êtes toustes flou·e·s* is an interactive sound installation. Using their smartphone, the visitor wanders through an extended scenography reminiscent of the atmosphere of a party emptied of its bodies. QR codes scattered over the space provide access to fragments of conversations recorded during student parties: intimate snippets, bursts of voices, nighttime confidences, shared banalities. Visitors are then free to recompose their own narrative based on their journey through the installation.

Blending nostalgia for a past world with personal sound archives, the installation invites viewers to cross the surface of the cinema screen, to become protagonists and to experience a floating, subjective and affective form of storytelling.

The first version of *Vous êtes toustes flou·e·s* was presented in 2021 as part of Marcelle Germaine's master's degree (DNSEP) at the National School of Fine Arts at the Villa Arson in Nice. Spread across three floors, the scenography unfolded through several spaces typical of parties (dance floor, intimate lounge, restrooms), in which seventeen QR codes invited the audience to engage in an active walk-through.

A second version was presented in 2024 as part of *Contre-Soirées*, an exhibition organized by the collective désamianT. Reconfigured into three sound-based windows accessible day and night, the installation featured twelve QR codes placed on the windows. The posters were designed by graphic designers Mathilde Morel and Barth Cardonne.

The third version is presented in Liège as part of Art au Centre #18, in the windows of a vacant shop located at 107 rue de la Cathédrale. For this new scenography, a graphic collaboration was carried out with students from the Advertising-Graphic Design studio of Liège Academy of Fine Arts, resulting in the creation of all the installation's posters.

A light wind ruffles the mountain of sand, accentuating uneven fractures, setting off slow cascades, erasing what remains of footprints. The heavier tracks of construction vehicles are likewise exposed to disappearance. Between inner life and the emptiness of an hourglass, the accumulated grains slide silently toward the ground, absorbing the rustlings of solitude. Faint palpitations ripple through the mass of colors, between pale gray and deep, tenebrous black, as if the bareness of the site amplified and condensed, through Benjamin Hollebeke's charcoal drawings, the desert vision of this zone of mounds and dunes artificially swollen by the haulage of machines.

Nevertheless, the emptiness of the eroded sands allows our porous memory to carve a passage through it, in narrow waters. Off-screen, on the slopes of the opposing mountain, covered with limestone rocks, flint, and wild bushes and trees, a flock of birds has nested in the tall grass. It offers reassurance to the gaze, suggesting that alongside the initial fascination with bareness, the presence of emotions and sensations, bearers of memories, can also emerge. The "desert of emptiness" becomes a journey into our sensitive inner space. Discreet, fragile, stretched, at times distant, the balance thus traced by the artist's eye forms the meditative and intimate structure of living beings, at least of those for whom re-enchanting life is no trivial matter.

In front of this artwork by Benjamin Hollebeke, the watcher discovers himself, as geographer Louis Poirier once wrote, as "the sole master of a secret land, which seems, for him alone, to let shine through the faint reflection of a buried treasure." *Nos lieux de bonheur* (Our places of happiness).

Benjamin Huynh's work explores how contemporary figurative painting is embedded within ecological, social and identity-based narratives. They question traditional definitions of the medium by approaching it as "transitive" or "expanded", in other words, relational.

For Art Au Centre, they pursue this research by working with ancestral methods of color-making. Through techniques involving painting and natural dyeing, in particular mordant painting and pigment extraction, they explore resilient plants associated with queer imaginaries, capable of reclaiming cities and wastelands. These plants become co-authors of a narrative of re-enchantment, far beyond the nature of a simple motif.

During their picking walks, they consider the act of harvesting as a methodology of observing: a choreography of attention in which grasses reveal stories of resistance. Painting thus becomes a living ecology, an invitation to perceive and reimagine the spaces we inhabit.

The work is here carried along by the unpredictability of the materials and the processes followed. The reaction between mordants and tannins always remains partially uncontrollable: each plant, each season, each bath creates a singular variation. The artworks continue to evolve over time, marked by light, humidity and their environment. The installation itself draws on motifs inspired by other windows in Liège.

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Opalima Kupina : Liège episode
A Stop Pavilion : On the Soft Underbelly of Europe.
 Nikolay Karabinovich, Odessa (Ukraine), 1988

“We work at night, we do what we can. Doubt is our passion, and passion is our assignment.”

What do we see? A deserted, battered office, a studio where someone once tried to shoot videos, apparently for some unknown YouTube channel. Later we learn it belonged to one of the decolonial detectives. His fate is murky, almost mythic. We know only this: once he found himself in Liège, he devoted himself to studying the activities of the Société Anonyme des Tramways d’Odessa, as well as Les Tramways de Palerme.

A few facts from the biography of Detective M.

After a severe frostbite injury (which cost him two toes), he was evacuated from Khmelnytskyi at the end of 2019 to Cairo, and from there moved on to Paris.

By car he made it as far as Bulgaria, where he drank again in a restaurant and began telling strangers that he was heading to Paris on a secret assignment for some unnamed special services.

In Liège, his studio opened on 12 February.

Back then he was always humming:

I get up — I get down

All my world turns around

Who is right? Who is wrong?

I don’t know

I’ve got pain in my heart

We move through life retroactively. Events unfold first; interpretation follows. Only with distance do we attempt to name what has occurred. Yet meaning is hardly fixed. It shifts with time, position, and perspective. This work inhabits that instability. It proposes a state in which interpretation never fully settles, where significance remains suspended rather than resolved. Meaning circulates continuously, refusing hierarchy or conclusion, slipping each time it seems within reach. What emerges is not an answer, but a condition: one of perpetual movement and delayed understanding.

Urban economics at street level lies at the heart of Mikail Koçak's practice. Scattered across several shop windows in the city center, his intervention builds on a shared observation: the multiplication of empty shops, soaring rents and increasing tax pressure.

His installation explores the mechanisms that transform the city center into a space of transit rather than a place to live. Through this fragmented occupation of windows, the artist reveals often abstract logics: loads of intermediaries, taxes and commissions (small or large) that condition the circulation of goods, bodies and services.

These issues are addressed through the distortion of language and play that usually lie at the core of Mikail Koçak's artistic work. He appropriates both familiar expressions and popular forms of entertainment to develop a narrative that fluctuates between playful humor and a critique of a dysfunctional situation.

For beneath humor emerges a political reading: that of a system in which everyone claims their cut, from the city to the property owner, from the owner to the shopkeeper, and ultimately to the end consumer. Mikail Koçak more broadly questions structures of intermediation that have become indispensable, but also organize, and sometimes lock down, the access to resources. Small and large commissions punctuate our everyday life, embedding themselves in all sectors and fields.

Mikail Koçak implicitly transforms empty shop windows into speculative platforms. Midway between laughter and unease, his installation invites us to look differently at the economic mechanisms of a city conceived more for transaction than for proper use.

An often-overlooked aspect of everyday life lies in these ephemeral sculptures made of discarded cardboard boxes and packaging, left on sidewalks awaiting their final journey to the garbage truck. A weekly, monthly, or even bi-monthly event in more remote areas. This work explores the sculptural forms these piles of cardboard inadvertently take, transforming mundane waste into objects of contemplation. Photographed at night, the series strips the scene of any context and removes all temptation to aestheticize, leaving only these temporary monuments.

But this project goes beyond a purely graphic study. These accumulations of cardboard reflect an unrestrained consumerism. Receiving a package, once a rare event that didn't require a dedicated collection day, is now a daily ritual for many, illustrating how radically our consumption habits have changed in just two decades.

Beyond their materiality, these boxes reveal fragments of life. Through their logos, labels, and sheer quantity, they trace an implicit economic portrait of the households that left them behind.

But they also expose something more intimate : some people stack their boxes carefully, edges cut clean, perfectly aligned and others abandon them carelessly, torn and collapsed under their own weight. Methodical or chaotic, meticulous or hurried, each leaves an unconscious mark on the pavement. Every pile becomes a sign, a trace of the home that produced it.

This silent language exists only for a few hours.Boxes left out late at night vanish by morning, swallowed by the garbage truck before the city awakens.This is the very essence of the series : to capture what few ever notice, what exists only in an in-between, a fleeting moment when the city still sleeps. To photograph them is to give presence to what disappears before it is even seen.

Barbaro After the Hunt is a video installation composed of three screens mounted on steel structures with bronze feet. It is inspired by the eponymous work of Rosa Bonheur, a nineteenth-century animal painter, in which the melancholic gaze of a hunting dog unsettles the traditional image of the predator. Conceived as a moving triptych, the installation creates a frontal and immediate connection with passersby. It builds on the imaginary of the hunting dog, a loyal animal, instrument of domination, masculinist totem, to generate a tension between an assumed instinct for predation and the possibility of a shared vulnerability. Filmed in Ille-et-Vilaine in an isolated kennel, a pack of predators stands at attention, waiting under an invisible constraint. The film combines real footage in slow motion with ethereal color grading to embody a polymorphous body that reminds of the “survival of the fittest.” Evoking both Cerberus and the Lernaean Hydra, the pack, at times comic, at times unsettling, stares at the camera for an extended moment before lunging toward an invisible target, invoking a collective re-reading of contemporary masculinities. In this frontal composition, the gaze is no longer unilateral; it is returned, even reversed. The window becomes, in turn, a mirror and a screen for our social hierarchies. This project seeks to reclaim language and symbols, to nuance binary oppositions, and to open doors toward understanding the mechanisms that could guide us to a less competitive and more empathetic social script, to comprehend where predators are fragile, and where companion species are strong.

Adrien Milon lives and works in Brussels. Born in Paris in 1998, he began his artistic journey in 2018 at isdaT (institut supérieur des arts et du design de Toulouse). After completing his bachelor's degree in 2021, he returned to Paris and joined the atelier of La Vache Bleue. In 2022, he resumed his studies at ARBA-ESA (Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts - École Supérieure des Arts) in Brussels.

In 2023, he co-founded L'Oscillobat, a self-managed space bringing together studios and an exhibition venue, which currently hosts around fifteen artists. In 2024, he completed his master's degree in sculpture at ARBA-ESA.

"I have always been fascinated by what lies 'outside the norm', not in the spectacular sense, but in what quietly slips into everyday life, almost invisible.

These are simple, instinctive gestures, where the ordinary transforms itself silently. A machine, a place, a banal object: anything can suddenly free itself from its primary function to meet a more intimate, more human necessity.

A knife with a broken tip becomes a screwdriver, stored in the toolbox.

A supermarket shopping cart is transformed into a barbecue.

Stacks of books piled beside the bed, supporting a lamp, improvising a bedside table for years.

These diversions and shifts in meaning feed my artistic practice.

From this poetry born of necessity and imagination emerges the essence of my work: an attention to the soul of objects, to their second life, to their discreet beauty."

Un buisson de clés (Sleutelbos)

Amber Roucourt, Tirlemont (BE), 1998

Amber Roucourt is an artist based in Brussels, in her atelier at Cas-co Leuven, she explores everyday objects that she often recreate, enlarge, and twist using ceramic. For her installation at Art Au Centre, she departs from a very common item: the key ring (*le porte-clés*). Yet, this seemingly banal object attracted Amber's attention, in the ways in which it is personalized and made recognizable by their owner: the key ring becomes a token of singularity, a personal carrier of memories in constant motion.

Her installation at Art Au Centre brings together a new ensemble of works, collected as key rings of absurd and playful dimensions. Their oversized dimensions make them unhandy to carry—or perhaps they are key chains to the city.

Thanks to the artist's recontextualisation, the pieces gain both physical and emotional presence when displayed in a vitrine. This is at the core of Amber's practice: to find the tension between memories, collecting and remembering what constitutes our identities. How do everyday objects carry and translate emotions, feelings of belonging and personal narratives?

In this installation, a series of recycled metal trays are stacked from largest to smallest, forming a shimmering tower that evokes both a domestic object and a monumental structure. The form loosely follows the floorplan of the Burj Khalifa—one of the world’s most ambitious architectural icons—yet here, it serves no commercial or residential function. Instead, it takes the shape of an oversized étagère: a familiar household item used to present and store goods. But in this case, the trays are completely empty.

Positioned in a vacant storefront window, the structure rests on a slowly rotating circular pedestal. This gentle, continuous motion invites passersby to look again—to wait for something to appear on the other side. Yet every side is the same: glimmering, tidy, and void. The rotation creates a subtle tension between expectation and stillness, visibility and meaning.

The installation reflects on cycles of consumption, the aesthetics of emptiness, and the symbolic weight of display in urban life. It draws a quiet parallel between the domestic and the monumental, between what we present and what is truly there. The reused trays carry the marks of past lives, hinting at absent goods, vanished routines, and a collective memory of use.

Placed within the context of Art au Centre—where art temporarily occupies spaces of commercial abandonment—*Empty Reflections* mirrors the vacant display window while transforming it. It offers a speculative object that feels both familiar and strange, ornamental and obsolete. A monument to nothing, it asks what remains when everything has been put away.

Through the *À nos jours heureux* series, I recount the life of my mother, Louise, born in the Congo of the 1950s. This life trajectory, seemingly simple, appeared to me as a territory to be cleared, a landscape of unspoken dreams, disappointed aspirations and humble resilience.

This series is not a re-creation, but rather a reinterpretation nourished by archives, memories and projections, drawing on AI tools to generate new perspectives.

Above all, it is a shared inquiry: I invite everyone to revisit their own lineage, to question what remains within us of the stories that go untold and that have shaped us.

The project describes the Maghrebi immigration in the 1960s, when workers came to labor in the construction sector. Starting from an etching of a travel prayer rug, the artist set herself to work by casting plaster slabs. Regularity, repetition, physical effort, concentration and accumulation: like a ritual, the work takes shape. A new slab, a new plaster rug is laid down, forming a kind of base. The installation thus takes on the appearance of a construction site.

Both heavy and fragile, much like the issues surrounding immigration, the installation sketches out a way of living together. Etching and plaster merge. No print is identical, shades of grey and variations in impression give depth to the gaze.

The province of Liège, like northern France, is a region where Maghrebi workers have greatly contributed and have long been present, whether in coal mining, the textile industry, steel production or construction. This migratory history is part of the memory of these territories.

The cart, made in Morocco in partnership with a local craftsman, symbolizes this displacement and the arrival of foreign labor.

* Rise for prayer, rise for work

Vivons caché·es is a tribute to marginal life, in the interstices of the city, on rooftops, in tunnels, squats and raves.

Everything that happens far from cameras, beyond fences and barbed wire.

Behind the formal approach and aesthetic dimension, behind the choice to depict cameras and the apparent banality of a security tool, lies a mortifying logic: a complex and intrusive system of surveillance that extends ever further. Through facial recognition or the analysis of messages sent to our loved ones on social networks, through the control of everyone, everywhere, all the time.

In a world where the norm has become obligation, living according to one's own rules, outside the laws of the market and the logic of "always more", has become a subversive act. It is also an affirmation of what scares them: that some people have values opposed to the world you are building and are determined to become its antagonists.

Facing the obviousness of the catastrophe, there are those who are indignant and those who act. Those who denounce and those who organize.
We are among those who organize.

Nous sommes de ceux qui s'organisent.

What we do not look at, what we do not listen to, what we do not speak about does not exist...

Beyond appearances, beyond the fictitious blinds that partially obstruct the gaze while standardizing what is seen by everyone, Raphaël Meng Wu's window materializes a boundary between two realities. Two worlds that coexist without interpenetrating: on one hand, the tumult of the street; on the other hand, the oppressive silence of a situation the artist reveals through his installation.

Hidden behind these white spaces, as if concealed behind conventions and unspoken rules, two couples pose as they are. Two men and two women. They stand in front of us, authentic, in their own moment, during which they can finally reveal themselves. Living in China, the reality of their daily lives is marked by separation, imposed by the weight of culture and by social and familial pressure. To get around these constraints, their only escape is often a marriage of convenience, a sad and silent façade, or travel abroad, brief interludes that allow them to reunite. If we do not look at them, if we do not listen to them, if we do not speak of them, they do not exist in the eyes of society.

By forcing passersby to stop and contort themselves to glimpse what initially escapes our eye, the artist turns us into actors in his work. By paying attention to the situation, each protagonist brings to life what would otherwise remain buried. For observing means bringing into the light what remains in the shadows. Observing means starting to understand. Observing, ultimately, means performing an act of resistance against indifference or imposed invisibility.

You who will recognize yourself, I wish you the strength to preserve that angelic beauty of flesh and bone, that modesty in the face of terror, that restraint in the face of carelessness. Contemporary art is now. Now is war. And I know that you who once saw me pass will not hold it against me if I say: it is war. You who smiled or grumbled at my earlier artworks, you know that if I write here "it's war", it is an attempt to act as if we were realizing it together, today, in the kitchen, smoking a cigarette or eating a vegan steak with very spicy sauce and lemon, telling ourselves: "fuck, it's war." You know very well, you who have made it this far, that we say "it's war" for the first and last time. Now, we are preparing for a peace economy. We discipline ourselves. We wage war on ourselves to go where we must go, in peace. We control our jaws, our stiffness in the face of the unfamiliar, our bites aimed at imaginary enemies in our nerves, drawing blood from our impulses. Workers in art have fought for a long time to try to play fair, to master language, the instrument, the presence of others in the form of an audience, an audience without mercy, since it is us. Us, when we attend an event in our cities, on sidewalks, by the train stations, or in alleyways where we dance, sing, or laugh, with objects or without objects, in big-box stores or on a small screen. A meta-story as old as the world, where we replay peace and war, and where, once the game is over, the encounter continues at the bar. The peace economy seeks escape, flight, and then a maquis where everything can be said. A social flight simulator called art: the convention that accepts that one individual, or a small number of individuals, alone facing the mass, can represent us all. Because trust has been built, because beauty and honesty have found their consent, this presence draws two tears from a smile and gives us back the energy to set off once again. We are looking for the right words. We walk around the neighborhood to make up numbers. We don't know how or with whom, but we learn quickly. Through simple conversations, with lowered thresholds of tolerance, we will cross the threshold to create the institutions of the future. If today we want peace, it is because all of us are dreamers. It is so improbable: overeducated male primates want to prepare it so badly that it ends up happening. So, if what we want seems impossible and yet we still launch it, if it holds only in our poor little ember, then perhaps it is art, a vibration that is neither nature nor culture, but what remains of energy at the very principle of our vital force. In the meantime, we must endure. And seek, for those who will recognize themselves, a place where, body to body, we reflect on what we are going to eat, collectively and individually, where we are going to live, and how to keep control over the coming day. We can create an artistic offer relying only on ourselves. We take turns providing a presence, a welcome where children hear the first words of a story that we ourselves have woven. A story that conveys values other than strength, money, accumulation, physical beauty, or the advertising norm where the other is a follower, and I am the winner. I would need several lifetimes to name the number of nuances we could welcome, simply because, at one point in the city, we take turns ensuring that the flame does not go out. Let's be pragmatic: if school and society tell us that everything they do is for our own good, to offer us a beautiful life full of responsibilities and rights, then I imagine that such a life will always be more beautiful in times of peace than in times of war.

Anyhow... Hooray!

Biospheric City

Xavier Mary, Liège (BE), 1982

February 12 to March 9

Xavier Mary develops a powerful sculptural practice. Using industrial materials and discarded auto parts, he creates monumental installations in which mechanics become a poetic language. His work questions notions of transformation, cycles and survival, while revealing a form of sacrality born from the waste of our capitalist, overconsuming society.

Biospheric City fully embodies this approach. The artwork takes the form of a structure composed of truck gearboxes, immediately asserting a mechanical rigor that unfolds into a sculptural language. The metal, polished and reworked by the artist's hand, retains the memory of industry and its specificities. Each bolt, each gear, inscribes within its frozen rotation a working-class story. Halfway between architecture and relic, the work conjures a hybrid city, both ruin and living organism, suggesting a possible rebirth after collapse.

Therian Infantes IX

Iwajla Klinke, Greifswald (DE), 1976

March 9 to April 30

Iwajla Klinke's work has a quasi-anthropological dimension, exploring how traditions and rituals shape individual identity across different cultures. She primarily creates portraits strongly influenced by traditions and cultural symbols. Her artworks often depict young people or children dressed in ceremonial or ritual costumes, capturing moments that seem timeless. Her work recalls Baroque or Renaissance painting, both in its treatment of light and in its staging.

The Therian Infante series was photographed during the Navaratri festival in various regions of Karnataka, India.

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