

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

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ANTOINE RENARD

Strange Attractors

Thursday 27 October - Saturday 17 December 2022



Sculpture en position 'repos' d'Antoine Renard. Paris, 2022.

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *Strange Attractors*, Antoine Renard's first solo exhibition in Brussels, only one year after his exhibition in Paris. Essentially sculptural, the originality of Antoine Renard's work lies in the boldness of its elaboration: telluric, digital and chemical elements with the olfactory signature of fragrant effluvia are brought together. Antoine Renard is an artist-researcher: after receiving his Diplôme National Supérieur d'Expression Plastique (DNSEP) at the Beaux-Arts de Dijon in 2008, he is currently completing a thesis on olfaction as an extended field of sculpture under the direction of Pascal Rousseau, in the frame of the SACRe doctoral programme between the PSL University and the Beaux-Arts de Paris. This dual competence allows him to develop hybrid creations that offer fertile ground for reflection in this very era of the 21st century. Communicative networks are generated through the activation of the visual and olfactory memories of the visitors. The exhibition space is thus transformed into a porous environment in which the works and those who experience them engage in a dialogue that occurs beyond the bounds of a perception of a reality that is constrained by one's observation of it.

For nearly fifteen years, Antoine Renard has been working on the subject of memory. The artist addresses historical memory through the re-actualisation of famous figures from the past. *The Little Dancer Aged Fourteen* (1875 - 1880) by Edgar Degas now shares the exhibition space with Donatello's *David* (1430-1432). This is neither an anachronism nor a bizarre association: these two characters have in common their adolescent, fragile and androgynous bodies, caught up in socio-political issues that lie at the heart of our modern societies. These subjects also converge in their capacity to inform collective memories and imaginations throughout the centuries as they participate in the mythification of bodies and contemporary Western identity. Both heroes and victims of their own condition, the question of the representation of the body and its reception – evoking antagonistic feelings such as disgust and admiration – is equally central. The artist proceeds to re-actualise their presence by elaborating the notion of hybridity: entanglements of various motifs create visual aesthetic shocks and call

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into question the place of the body in contemporary industrialised, mechanised and spectacularised production systems. In this way, the slender figure of the David clashes with the robust and exploded – yet far from exquisite – flower used as a face. The male body is slender, while the flower is massive and seems, captured as it is in the solidity of the clay, to defy the brevity of the vegetal cycle. A temporal contradiction is created: the flower is seasonal, and the work of art is perennial. In its sculpted form, it is now part of history and becomes immortal. Antoine Renard works on his subjects until they are exhausted, exploring all the possibilities of sculpture. The latter becomes a reflection of our contemporaneity, and perhaps even the mirror of our own humanity: what does it have to say to us? What does it say about us?

This recollective capacity is also explored in the production process of the works, notably in the use of 3D-printing for his ceramic sculptures. This device materializes a representation that had hitherto only been modelled on the screen: the clay is deposited mechanically layer by layer, resembling a process of accelerated sedimentation. However, despite the precision of this ultracontemporary high-tech machine, cracks, irregularities, and rough spots appear in the composition. By using state-of-the-art technology, the artist explores the flaws and unpredictability of the machine's work. At a time when the mechanical age has transformed our landscapes and our practices – driving the craftsman out of his workshop and replacing him with the faster, inanimate machine – Antoine Renard once again breathes life into his works: the manufactured object is transformed into a handmade ceramic, sensitive to its environment. In this way, the sculptures are erected like ruins, similar to the vestiges of memory, at the intersection of absence and presence, lifting the veil from figures that emerge from the past.

Relational dynamics are brought into the exhibition space, awakening the senses beyond the visible: the sense of smell is solicited, memory springs to the fore. The fragrant scents shape the bodies. By applying fragrances to his sculptures, Antoine Renard pays homage to the infinite complexity of a personality that is often reduced – in the case of Marie Van Goethem (Edgar Degas' *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*) and Donatello's *David* – to caricature and silence. His research into perfume during his residency at the Villa Medici in Rome in 2019 and during his trip to Peru allowed him to explore all the subtleties of the living. An interest that stems from his apprenticeship with healers in South America, the 'shamanes parfumeros' who have a broad knowledge of fragrance in its mystical relationship to the body and healing.

This work on the theme of memory is also apparent in his latest experiments. The artist presents a dozen drawings printed on watercolour paper. These images were created by a tailor-made algorithm: using images from the world of Edgar Degas' *Little Dancer Aged Fourteen*, the process attempts to explore the psychological arcana of the character. In this way, by feeding the machine with fragments of images inherent to the dancer's history, Antoine Renard attempts to trace the source of her psychology. The collected impressions are then further elaborated by the artist who, in the continuation of his work on care, dilutes the ink on the sheet, as if to purify it. A dream-like phantasmagoria, journeying into the bowels of a still unexplored psychic universe, emanates from these new unstructured images. According to the artist, figuration is an abstraction of reality when it falls under the gaze of the visitor. Antoine Renard's work, by evading the conflict between the abstract and the figurative, has the power to activate our thinking and to transform our relationship with the world and the things in it.

¹ In the words of Thomas Carlyle: "the living artisan is driven from his workshop, to make room for a speedier, inanimate one", *Signs of the Time*, 1829, p.1

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Born in 1984 in Paris, Antoine Renard lives and works between Paris and Lourdes, France.

A graduate of the DNSEP art program at the Beaux-Arts in Dijon, in 2008, Antoine Renard has won numerous prizes and residencies, notably the Inkubator Innovator fellowship (Germany, 2015); the Goethe Institute Residency Prague (Czech Republic, 2017); the Résidence Cheval Noir (with Komplot), Brussels (Belgium, 2018). In 2019, he was awarded the Occitanie – Medici Prize, and the same year he also received a scholarship for the CNAP's artistic project and a residency at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. What's more, Antoine Renard was the winner of the doctoral program SACRe 2020, from PSL University. His thesis, under the direction of Pascal Rousseau, focalizes on olfaction as an extension of sculpture.

Antoine Renard has already been the subject of several important solo exhibitions, including *PHARMAKON*, Centre Régional d'Art Contemporain, Sète (France, 2021), *Geometries of -l-o-v-e*, Very, Berlin (Germany, 2019); *Cats in the City*, Komplot, Brussels (Belgium, 2018); *1999*, Marsèlleria, Milan (Italy, 2017); *Resource Operation (Part II)*, In-Extenso, Clermont-Ferrand (France, 2017); *Resource Operation (Part I) "The monk's corridor"*, Tlön, Nevers (France, 2017); *I spell it Nature*, DIESEL, Liège (Belgium, 2016).

Antoine Renard's works were also included in significant group exhibitions, including *Power Flower*, Biennale de Nice, Nice (France, 2022), *Respirer l'Art, quand l'art contemporain sublime l'univers du parfum*, Musée International de Grasse, (France, 2022), *Futur, ancien, fugitif. Une scène française*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris (France, 2019); *The Future of Memory*, Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna (Austria, 2015); *Saturn Drive*, Kunstverein am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin (Germany, 2015); 58th Salon de Montrouge, Paris (France, 2013).

In 2022, he will have a solo exhibition at the Cité des Sciences in Paris (France).

Antoine Renard has been represented by Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/Brussels since 2021.

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