

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

BRUXELLES

## JOHANNA MIRABEL

### *I WISH*

September 4 – October 25, 2025



Detail: *White Heat*, 2025, Oil, oil stick, charcoal and iridescent metallic pigments on aluminium

Gallery Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *I Wish*, Johanna Mirabel's first solo exhibition in Brussels, following her show last year at the gallery's Beaubourg location.

A graduate of the Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2019, Johanna Mirabel is a French artist of Guyanese descent whose work is gaining increasing recognition on both the French and international art scenes. She was awarded the Ritzau Art Prize in New York (2022), the Emerige grant in Paris (2023), and the CPGA Etant Donn   prize in Miami (2024). Together with her sister Esther Mirabel, she has been selected for the 2026 Villa Albertine programme. In September 2025, Frac Auvergne will devote a major solo exhibition to her work.

In her earlier series *Adieu la Chair*, the artist focused on representations of carnival, creating a dialogue between classical painting—referencing works by Ensor—and carnival traditions in French Guiana, exploring their syncretic entanglements. A proponent of non-militant universalism, Johanna Mirabel is known for bringing together diverse cultural threads in her painting. Her work draws on a range of sources, from personal photographic archives capturing moments in French Guiana to references to the history of Western painting, notably Francis Bacon and Diego Vel  zquez.

In her new exhibition, Johanna Mirabel explores the motif of ex-voto, focusing in particular on their potential for symbolic interweaving. Also known as votive paintings, these na  ve representations—often created as tokens of gratitude to a spiritual force—are found throughout the history of painting. They first emerged in medieval Europe and later appeared

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in Latin America and Mexico in the 19th century. Called *retablos* or *láminas* in Mexico, ex-voto blend Spanish Catholic heritage with pre-Columbian traditions, embodying a tension between the sacred and the profane. They often depict scenes of disaster, healing, or other signs of miraculous intervention.

In her new paintings, Johanna Mirabel draws on the narrative quality of these popular forms, infusing themes of healing with her signature focus on interior scenes—often centred around a bed. Rather than depicting specific stories, the artist chooses to evoke archetypal ex-voto scenes—healings, fires, and moments of contemplation. In doing so, she deepens her exploration of the syncretic potential within a transcultural system of representation. Rather than anchoring her figures in a specific tradition or era, Mirabel focuses on the precision of details: hands and feet are rendered with great care, and particular attention is given to posture.

While ex-voto are traditionally small-format paintings—reflecting the limited means of their makers—the accumulation of vignettes typically associated with them finds a different expression in some of the works in the exhibition, as in *Before It Speaks*, where a cluster of small green frames appears grouped together.

In her exploration of votive painting within a contemporary context, the artist draws on a varied pictorial vocabulary that is at once abstract, expressive, and gestural. She borrows in particular from the solemn representational tradition of Albrecht Dürer and Egon Schiele, whose bodies, caught in tension, evoke a deeply embodied spirituality. Broad abstract gestures serve as connectors between the different visual registers and references she mobilises to subvert the narrative codes of ex-voto—a way of reappropriating their iconography and opening up their interpretive space.

In *White Heat*, the figures gather in an enclosed space marked by sweeping gestures of purple paint—an unprecedented choice in the artist's practice, evoking the sacred and traditionally associated with Lent. These purple tones are offset by ochres, a signature element in her palette, evoking the ochre soils of French Guiana and the reddish earth pigment used in sanguine, a drawing technique from the Renaissance. On a symbolic level, purple combines red—evocative of flesh, blood, and life in religious iconography—and blue, a colour long associated with spirituality and devotion. In this chromatic union, the living and the sacred are brought together, creating a space that feels both embodied and mystical.

Constantly in search of new pictorial experiences and recently exploring the integration of abstract and realistic styles within a single work, Johanna Mirabel continues to expand her visual language—this time by working on aluminium for the first time.

This reference to ex-voto—often painted on metal—echoes Robert Rauschenberg's own experiments with metal surfaces. The material, new to Mirabel's practice, allows her to explore a range of textures and material effects, conceived in their diversity as a reflection of a plural, multicultural world that encourages dialogue between different identities.

Attuned to current events, the artist continues to engage with themes of multiculturalism and diversity in her work. Johanna Mirabel chooses to depict the disasters typical of ex-voto within a political context in which multiple identities are increasingly contested, evoking a sense of threat to the very existence of certain minority populations.

Johanna Mirabel's literary references—particularly the writings of Édouard Glissant—inform her reflection on the history of Mexican ex-voto and the creolisation of a belief system that originated in Catholic Spain before being appropriated by indigenous cultures. Rooted in the tradition of votive painting, she develops a sensitive visual language with universal resonance, carried by a luminous and expressive palette.

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Born in Colombes (France) in 1991, Johanna Mirabel lives and works in Paris (France).

A 2019 graduate of the Beaux-Arts de Paris, Johanna Mirabel is the winner of the tenth edition of the Bourse Révélation Emerige entitled Hit Again, curated by Gaël Charbeau. In 2025, the FRAC Auvergne will devote an ambitious solo exhibition to her work. Together with her sister Esther Mirabel, Johanna Mirabel is a laureate of the 2026 cohort of the Villa Albertine. Her work will be presented in a solo exhibition at Galerie Nathalie Obadia in September 2025.

Johanna Mirabel's paintings depict figures occupying domestic spaces that often open onto a dreamlike exterior. The interiors in which the figures evolve call on the artist's memories, from Guyanese houses to New York brownstones from the Harlem Renaissance. Childhood memories and recent experiences enter in dialogue at the heart of the pictorial surface, creating syncretic universes.

Her paintings explore the permeability of interior and exterior notions. Lush vegetation enters the home to inhabit these enclosed, familiar spaces. The realistic treatment of bodies and faces contrasts with the sketched elements of décor, metaphors for evanescent and changing memories.

The porosity between the figure and its environment is reinforced by the use of color: the skin tones blend seamlessly into the shades of the walls and floors, in cameos of ochres, browns and reds. For the artist, these colors are a point of anchorage or filiation with French Guiana, from Creole red earths to citations of Tembe art, a color palette that gains further dynamism in communion with the cerulean blues and cadmium yellows that the artist draws from Helen Frankenthaler's paintings.

In 2023, Johanna Mirabel benefited from a residency at the Fondation H, which organized a solo exhibition of her work. The same year, the artist took part in Immortelle at MO.CO (Montpellier, France), an exhibition designed to offer a panorama of young French figurative painting. She participates to a number of group shows, notably at the French Institute in Madrid (Spain), Hôtel de Craon, (La Rochelle, France), Villa Belleville (Paris, France), Manifesta (Lyon, France), and La Conciergerie, (Paris, France).

Johanna Mirabel's works have joined renowned collections including the Fondation H (Antananarivo, Madagascar) and the Museum of African Art (Marrakech, Morocco), the Weissmann Family Collection (New York, USA), the Green Family Art Foundation (Dallas, USA), the X Museum (Beijing, China), and the Underdog Collection (Italy).

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For further information, please contact Valérie Wille  
valerie@nathalieobadia.com / + 32 (0)2 640 03 90

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**Brussels** Charles Decoster

**Johanna Mirabel**

*I Wish*

September 4 – October 25, 2025

**Paris** Cloître Saint-Merri

**Fiona Rae**

September 6 – October 25, 2025

**Paris** Saint-Honoré

**Fiona Rae**

September 6, 2025

**Sacha Cambier de Montravel**

November 6, 2025 – January 10, 2026

**Andres Serrano**

*A Personal Mythology Immersions and Bodily Fluids*  
(1986–1990)

10 november, 2025

**Mickalene Thomas**

October 19, 2025 – January 3, 2026

**Paris** Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

**Viswanadhan**

January - March 2026

**Patrick Faigenbaum**

10 november, 2025

**Rosson Crow**

January 17, 2026