

SACHA CAMBIER DE MONTRAVEL

j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. — Et je l'ai trouvée amère

6 November 2025 – 10 January 2026



Le massacre des innocents, 2025, Oil on wood.

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. — Et je l'ai trouvée amère* ('I sat Beauty on my knees. — And I found her bitter'), Sacha Cambier de Montravel's first solo exhibition at the gallery in Brussels. With a singular ensemble of eleven paintings, the artist carries the viewer into a snow-covered landscape at the heart of post-industrial Flanders. The exhibition resonates with the Flemish pictorial tradition of the sixteenth century, with Brueghel the Elder as its foremost figure. The architecture of the region forms the backdrop for a wandering in which the protagonists yield to gestures that are at once sensual and destructive. Here, the wounds of the present continue this tradition: human and canine figures evoke the contemporary homosexual condition, while the frozen surfaces turn into mirrors of a world in search of meaning.

Sacha Cambier de Montravel's painting situates itself within a rich constellation of references, reminiscent of major figures such as Bosch, Brueghel, Caravaggio, Dürer, Saedeleer, Van Heil, De Vos, and Patinier. These influences are rooted as much in the artist's Belgian origins as in his dual education at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and La Cambre in Brussels. The choice of wood panels as medium, echoing ancient practices where art and craftsmanship converge, imparts a distinctive materiality to the work. The grain of the wood, still perceptible beneath the paint, engages with sculpted frames that suspend each scene in a space poised between past and present. This temporal dimension continues in his reinterpretations of historical works,

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most notably *The Massacre of the Innocents*—Brueghel's masterpiece—which he transposes onto the village of Esplechin, set against an architectural backdrop marked by the legacy of the coal-mining era. The monumental tree emblematic in this painting, borrowed from the Flemish painter but enlarged, seems to have survived the centuries as a silent witness to violence: from the massacres perpetrated under the Duke of Alba¹ to the persecution of homosexuals today. In the frozen puddle, the image of the Sacred Heart emerges as an echo of the violence of the Paris Commune. By confronting distinct times and spaces, Sacha Cambier de Montravel reminds us that, despite resistance, every era gives rise to its own 'Duke of Alba': history repeats itself and, *There will always be winters*.

The artist thus situates his works in dialogue with history while opening a window onto contemporary torments. At the heart of this aesthetic, the question of *queer* desire emerges, notably through an explicit reference to *chemsex*. This phenomenon—at once collective pleasure and perilous terrain—becomes a metaphor for the contradictions of contemporary desire: freedom and dependence, pleasure and threat, culminating even in the pursuit of programmed self-destruction. These tensions take form in images where bodies—often concealed, ashamed, behind windows where the shadow of the Church is never far—embrace in fragile intimacy, even as outside, stray or lifeless dogs attempt to drink from a frozen puddle. If, as Judith Butler writes, 'the body is always a site of resistance to the norms that govern its materialisation',² the painted figures give form to a painful inner struggle, verging on a poetics of destruction. On the immaculate snow, the figures surrender to intoxication; yet this deceptive whiteness conceals a menacing powder, casting the universe into disenchantment.

The exhibition's very title, *I sat Beauty on my knees. — And I found her bitter*—borrowed from Arthur Rimbaud³—announces this paradoxical confrontation with beauty. Hervé Guibert⁴ grasped this very cruelty in the midst of the AIDS crisis when he wrote in *To the Friend Who Did Not Save My Life* (1990): 'Beauty, when it turns against you, is all the more cruel because it had saved you.' In this vein, Sacha Cambier de Montravel develops an aesthetic and political reflection, animated by a queer community that confronts dominant discourse in its *negative*⁵ dimension. This reflection takes shape as a theatre of the gaze: the gaze we cast upon those who consume themselves in destructive pleasure, conscious that no victory will be granted them. And as we watch without acting, the flames—as beautiful as they are cruel—pursue their work, consuming the pavilion amid collective indifference.

1 Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, 3rd Duke of Alba (1507–1582), governor of the Spanish Netherlands (1567–1573), was one of the principal agents of Philip II's political, religious, and moral repression.

2 The American philosopher Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993); French translation: *Ces corps qui comptent*, trans. Charlotte Nordmann (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2009).

3 The French poet Arthur Rimbaud, whose title comes from the prologue of *A Season in Hell*, dating from April-August 1873.

4 French writer and journalist (1955-1991).

5 According to Lee Edelman (*No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, 2004; French trans. *L'impossible homosexuel*, EPEL, 2013), queer negativity refers to a position of non-being, intolerable and subversive, which undoes identity and radically rejects normativity.

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Sacha Cambier de Montravel, born in 1995 in Liège, Belgium, lives and works in Paris.

A graduate in Visual Arts from La Cambre in 2020 and from the Beaux-Arts in Paris in 2022, Sacha Cambier de Montravel received the *Entrée en collection award* and the *Félicité prize* that same year.

Deeply influenced by the Flemish pictorial tradition, he situates his practice in a lineage extending from Van Eyck to Patinier, by way of Bosch and Bruegel, and in dialogue with masters of engraving such as Dürer and Doré. From this heritage he has drawn a keen sense of detail, an attentiveness to symbols, and a narrative approach in which each image invites multiple interpretations. His compositions, infused with Byzantine, Gothic, and Romantic aesthetics, explore the interplay of light and chiaroscuro, heightened by the brilliance of gold or silver leaf.

Several years ago, Sacha Cambier de Montravel set aside canvas in favour of wood, reviving a medium rooted in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance whose technical and symbolic qualities he fully exploits. Its rigid, smooth surface lends itself to precise painting, turning each panel into the stage for a miniature world. Like early polyptychs, his works can be read in fragments: colourful scenes, enigmatic figures, and signs to be deciphered coexist in a shifting equilibrium. Each image takes shape over time, poised between revelation and mystery.

Blending the language of comic books with carefully selected sacred iconography, his work is distinguished by an original formal and narrative approach. Without nostalgia, the artist revives ancient pictorial traditions to offer a contemporary vision: a painting at once erudite and sensitive, where the visual memory of Flanders engages with contemporary imagination.

Sacha Cambier de Montravel has taken part in solo and group exhibitions including *j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. — Et je l'ai trouvée amère* at Galerie Nathalie Obadia (Brussels, Belgium, 2025), *Gothiques* at the Louvre-Lens (Lens, France, 2025), *Guilty Pleasures* at Galerie Nathalie Obadia (Paris, France, 2025), and the 68th edition of the Salon de Montrouge (Montrouge, France, 2025). His work has also been presented at the *Luxembourg Art Fair* (Luxembourg City, Luxembourg, 2024), in *Rayonnement* (Private Choice, Paris, France, 2024), and in *No Future comme disaient les punks* (Les Jardiniers de Montrouge, Montrouge, France, 2024).

In 2023, he participated in *Desire* (We are Village, Berlin, Germany). The year 2022 was marked by his participation in *Ec(h)o Poétique* (Les Grandes Serres de Pantin, Pantin, France), *Disaster Class* (Tour Orion, Montreuil, France), *Last Minute* (Espace Voltaire, Paris, France), the *Exposition des Félicités* (Beaux-Arts de Paris, France), *La sorcière, le bouffon, les sentinelles, le fantôme et la princesse* (Château de Vincennes, Vincennes, France), and *Les rats qui flottent* (Espace Bouchor, Paris, France).

His first exhibitions date back to 2021 with *Workshop Trecento* (Galerie Italienne, Paris, France), *Limbes* (La Tannerie de Houdan, Houdan, France), *Art Paris* (Palais Éphémère, Paris, France), and *À la recherche de toujours* (Palais des Expositions, Paris, France). He also participated in the *Exposition des diplômants* (Espace Vanderborcht, Brussels, Belgium, 2020) and *Labo Demo* (Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles, Paris, France, 2020).

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Brussels Charles Decoster

Sacha Cambier de Montravel

*j'ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. —
Et je l'ai trouvée amère*
November 6, 2025 - January 10,
2026

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

Andres Serrano

*A Personal Mythology: Immersions
and Bodily Fluids (1986 - 1990)*
November 10, 2025 - January 24, 2026

Paris Saint-Honoré

Mickalene Thomas

je t'adore deux
October 19, 2025 - January 3, 2026

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

Viswanadhan

January 15 - maart 2026

Patrick Faigenbaum

Paris, Saint-Louis, Santulussurgiu 2019 - 2024
November 10, 2025 - January 2026

Rosson Crow

January 17, 2026