Pionnières
Exhibition
05 March — 07 May 2022

Claude Cahun, Tiphaine Calmettes, Eden Tinto Collins, Laura Gozlan, Kapwani Kiwanga, Anita Molinero, Tania Mouraud, ORLAN & Nora Turato

12 rue Lamoricière, 44100 Nantes
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The inaugural exhibition *Pionnières*, presented by Zoo galerie in its new space at 12 rue Lamoricière, will bring together key figures from the second half of the 20th century to the present day. Dedicated to women artists, this exhibition is part of the reinstatement of their contribution in contemporary creation, carried these last years by prestigious institutions and art centers in France and abroad of which Zoo gallery (which, since its beginnings, has presented personal exhibitions to women artists, from Delphine Coindet to Tiphaine Calmettes, from Émilie Pitoiset to Camille Tsvétoukhine, from Laetitia Badaut-Haussmann to Lily Renaud-Dewar).

Beyond the question of quotas, which raises real questions about the presence of women in contemporary art - the statistics in this direction are evident - it is a question of showing their contribution in the contemporary creation. Or, rather, to participate in this movement which tends to give them the place which they deserve. We do not pretend to measure ourselves to the power of a museum like the Centre Pompidou which, with "Elles font l'abstraction", shed light on their role which was, for a long time, put on the back burner, even made invisible, and yet quite predominant in the birth of artistic movements as fundamental as that of the abstraction.

Remember Hilma af Klint, that some consider from now on as one of the pioneers of the abstract art, before Kandinsky; or Yoko Ono, a long time presented as the companion of John Lennon before being recognized in the history of performative art; or Âgnes Dénes, who, well before men artists were concerned with ecology, created in 1982, at the doors of Manhattan, an immense field of wheat, Wheatfield.

With *Pionnières*, we wish to participate in this movement of rewriting the history of contemporary creation by including women and their contributions, often marked by radicalism, the dispute of any established artistic order and the denunciation of all forms of domination stemming from a patriarchal order which, within the medium of the art as elsewhere - the current events of the media confirm it to us every day - continue to advance, more or less concealed.

Starting from the almost legendary character of Claude Cahun - and her partner Marcel Moore - who early on asserted a total freedom over moral through her self-portraits and other publications, *Pionnières* wished to invite artists whose work is in the radical and uninhibited wake of the Nantes artist. It is not a matter of tracing a precise historical course, but rather of drawing a path, made of affinities and admiration.

The presence of Tania Mouraud within this "sisterhood" seemed particularly obvious to us. The artist is known to have violently gotten rid of her pictorial past in an auto-da-fé which marked her close relations: starting point of her plunge into the adventure of conceptual art, that she will mark deeply by her *Rooms of initiation*, which offer an innovative glance on the object, but especially by getting rid of the necessity of the presence of the latter to concentrate on the mental space of the looker. Thereafter, she will devote herself to the saturation of the urban space, that she will target a first time with the series of the NI, then with her numerous Wall Paintings, at the limit of the legibility, which forces the passer-by to consider the hold of the advertising statements on his imagination. Today, she continues the battle by creating a series of photographs which testify of the more than ambiguous discourses on the energy policies of the European nations.

The figure of ORLAN is likewise a staple in this reunion of precursors: her actions, spectacular, intended to reveal the dependence of women on the power of men, seemed necessarily highlighted. The social, political and religious pressures which are printed on the body of the woman were questioned by the artist throughout her career and she did not cease to do so. ORLAN seized, not without humor, the "feminine aesthetic" and its "canons", that she pointed out, without shaking, to make sway an aesthetic dominated by the male reason.
Anita Molinero's work, likewise, is profoundly pioneering, tackling one of the flagship objects of modernity: the garbage can, which symbolizes a society's ability to get rid of cumbersome waste while masking its unavoidable demise. Molinero's work, which has made these indispensable urban objects the raw material for her plastic concretions, is now at the heart of a societal and existential debate: that of the proliferation of waste that threatens the future of life on our planet. As a modern witch, Anita Molinero transcends our millennialist fears to create perfectly jubilant plastic forms.

To the work of these great elders, we wished to associate the work of a young generation, which we believe that, in some ways, is inspired by and perpetuates it. If the struggles of the pioneers we have just mentioned remain absolutely relevant, the work of the young artists hereafter is embodied differently to evoke them. Seizing new stakes, taking into account new difficulties - perhaps less evident - to assert their practice, they use modern tools which were non-existent twenty years ago.

The works of Nora Turato are essentially turned towards language, or rather: the language that circulates on social networks, and more widely in the infosphere. The Croatian artist seizes the statements that disproportionately swell the content of this nebula called "the Web" to produce cathartic performances. She vocalizes this new language, passing from melody to song and from scandalized narrative to imprecation, fatally leading to the breakdown of a logic of discourse that wants words to be in tune with speech and phrasing to be understood. Nora Turato deeply renews the art of the cut-up, wishing to give an account of the fundamental rukus of the human species.

Tiphaine Calmettes is interested in ruderal plants, anthropomorphic menhirs, vegetable concrete, mother of kombucha... This heterogeneous enumeration reflects the concerns of an artist who is passionate about the cohabitation between the living and the inert, for the possibility that plants have to recolonize a space that is increasingly disputed to them, putting back in force, in passing, remedies that were said to be "grandmother 's" and that refer to disappeared knowledge. Tiphaine Calmettes' work is deeply rooted in an era that seeks, as much as it can, to preserve the living through non-authoritarian actions — like this mother of kombucha that she allowed to proliferate until it covered the basin that housed it.

Kapwani Kiwanga, laureate of the 2021 Duchamp Prize, is also interested in plants, and more specifically in flowers, whose presence she revisits in installations that challenge their usual function of pleasure and celebration. The bouquets Kiwanga stages are all related to significant historical events in recent colonial history. Unlike those usually used in official ceremonies, they are left to decay. Not renewed, the flowers thus become the symbol of buried tragedies, withering naturally as they dry up. The symbolism of mourning is eminently present in her pieces with evocative titles. Like the interpretation of historical events and their survival in the collective memory, which fluctuates widely, the composition of the bouquet is left to the discretion of the florist and/or the curator - a way of referring to the burial and concealing of a parallel history, but also to the way in which the latter is constructed.

Laura Gozlan created the character of Mum, who appears in her videos as the non-binary avatar of her creator. In her parodic films with a deleterious and grotesque atmosphere, the artist explores the millennial discourses coming from New Age and cybernetic precedents, reboosted by new techno-utopian ideologies. Her repulsive-looking character is an "anti-sex symbol", a real nightmare of a patriarchy fed with the image of the femme fatale. Her videos describe the ineluctable physical and mental degradation of this postmodern witch. After having promoted an onanism doped with magical practices, the artist recidivates in her last production by putting in scene Cloacina, "Latin goddess of the sewers" (sic), to which she makes replay the ancient opposition between the high and the low, the air and the confined, the pure and the soiled.
Eden Tinto Collins is a pioneer of the networks, a third world rebel who displays her Blackness without batting her eyes, but without wanting to take possible revenge. Conscious of the mountains to be overcome to reach a mythical decolonization of the Western society, she prefers the wacky futuro dreams of a Sun Ra, of which she adopts with flamboyance the scenic surprise. ETC knows how to do everything: sing like Whitney Houston and Beyoncé, write like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Norman Spinrad, create concepts like "entase", which reconnects geeky novlanguage and suburban slang, Afro-international lingo and post-human mythology, cyborg and "blackploitation".

In line with this exhibition, Zoo galerie has published an interview conducted by Carole Douillard, a performance artist living in Nantes, with two pioneering American artists: Barbara T. Smith and Susan Lacy who participated in the great adventure of the birth of performance art.

The opening of its new space will also allow Zoo galerie to develop its activities, in particular the opening of a bookstore that will offer a selection of reference works in the fields of contemporary art, aesthetics, poetry, and new writing, and to promote its own editorial line and the magazine 02, published by Zoo galerie, which will celebrate its 25th anniversary and its 100th issue.

**Patrice Joly, curator of the exhibition Director of Zoo galerie, founder and editor-in-chief of 02 magazine**
Visuals for the press

Claude Cahun et Marcel Moore, double selfportrait Claude Cahun (left) & Marcel Moore (right), 1948, Jersey © collection Patrice Allain

Claude Cahun, "Vivante tanagra" (selfportrait), 1911 © collection Patrice Allain
Visas for the press

Tiphaine Calmettes, installation view Theater d’objets, 2022 (from objects made between 2018 and 2022), Le Crédac Art Center in Ivry-sur-Seine. Ceramic, carpet, plants, concrete, bread, Kombucha, metal, variable size © ADAGP, Paris, 2022

Tiphaine Calmettes, installation view Theater d’objets, 2022 (from objects made between 2018 and 2022), Le Crédac Art Center in Ivry-sur-Seine. Ceramic, carpet, plants, concrete, bread, Kombucha, metal, variable size © ADAGP, Paris, 2022
Visuals for the press


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Laura Gozlan, Foulplay #3, photogramm, 2022 © Laura Gozlan

Laura Gozlan, Foulplay #1, photogramm, 2022 © courtesy Laura Gozlan
Visuals for the press
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Visuals for the press

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Nora Turato, *Thanks I hate it!*, video still, 2020 © Nora Turato

Nora Turato, *Thanks I hate it!*, video still, 2020 © Nora Turato
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Zoo galerie receives the support of the City of Nantes, the Pays de la Loire Region, the Loire Atlantique Departmental Council and the Ministry of Culture (Drac des Pays de la Loire)