

Red hoods, puddles, flash floods and other tangential micro-narratives

A COLLECTIVE EXHIBITION FROM JANUARY 13 TO FEBRUARY 3, 2024

WITH NATHAN ANDRÉ, RYM ESSEGHAIER, ELENA GALEEVA, GABRIEL GRILLOT, JIHYE JUNG & JINGQI YUAN. CURATOR : PATRICE JOLY.

The Zoo contemporary art centre welcomes six young artists who have just graduated from Esad TALM Le Mans, continuing its commitment to young and emerging artists, after welcoming graduates from the Nantes School of Fine Arts in September 2023, in the Prima Materia exhibition.

In her latest book, « Quelles histoires s'écrivent dans les musées » (1) (*What stories are being written in museums?*), Magali Nachtergaele discusses the ability of artists to unravel stories that were thought to be solidly woven, the better to rewrite them. While her analyses focus more specifically on official narratives, the pre-eminence of which a new generation of artists, largely influenced by a European and technocentric vision, is doing its utmost to challenge, these counter-narratives emanating from increasingly visible figures on the national and international scene are largely infusing a young scene that has emerged from art schools. These micro-narratives, to which the researcher refers, function as snippets and clues that the viewer is invited to piece together in order to reconstruct the narrative logic. In these small stories, the artists focus on anecdotal accounts of everyday, banal situations, but also on the zany or improbable, which escape the logic of the dominant narratives. For example, a horse that stops in front of the unexpected mirror of a puddle of water reminds us of the surprise we can feel when confronted with the behaviour of animals, questioning our relationship with them and the possibility of attributing to them a capacity to 'imagine'; canvases of young people urinating in the street confront us with disturbing situations and the social conventions that frame them. As the author also points out, these narratives escape the expectations we generally have of a particular group and the standard behaviourst hey are supposed to adopt.

These micro-narratives are also an opportunity for artists to revisit scenarios that were thought to be immovable, with "stabilised" readings, such as the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, which can now be rethought from the angle of a new paradigm, that of the mass immigration of young girls from the East and the new clothes of the wolf in the fable, participating in a new construction of identity. In the same way that the anxiety-provoking narrative of global warming, which is strongly imprinted on the minds of the younger (and not so younger) generations, can be sublimated by invigorating counter-narratives; the discourse of all-powerful technology can also be re-evaluated in the light of its mythical, Promethean origins.

The six works in the exhibition are all unexpected and poetic, deviant and touching, but also terribly topical, and sometimes - the height of the unthinkable in the contemporary art world - they can even make us smile.

Nathan André (a 2022 graduate) has no use for alarmist and collapsionist projections, and

while he is as sensitive as anyone to the problems of global warming (let's stop calling it change!), he is not affected by it, he does not suffer from eco-anxiety, the malady of the century that particularly strikes the younger generations. He calls himself an « ecofurious » person, which puts him in a position of actively seeking solutions rather than morbid passivity: The animations he creates with the help of Artificial Intelligence (so much for reappropriating digital tools to transgress their usual uses linked to the exploitation of personal data) draw futuristic architectures that put at the centre of this discipline the preservation of water resources, as well as that of the small winged fauna that is more and more threatened. Nathan André combines drawing, video and models to create a resolutely stimulating utopian vision.

Rym Esseghaier's (2023 graduate) focus on puddles may seem anecdotal, but that's to ignore the origins of this attraction on the part of a young artist from Tunisia, where puddles, or rather potholes, are of particular importance to her compatriots: Initially taken as a symbol of the country's difficulties in maintaining its roads, the puddle has become for the young artist a catalyst that enables her to turn this national syndrome into a source of multiple filmic explorations. This 'natural screen' with its variable contours is capable of capturing the surrounding urban and rural landscapes, but it also has an almost supernatural dimension due to the imaginary abyss and depth it conceals, which the young video artist knows perfectly well how to exploit. The micro-pool can also be transformed into a real dj turntable thanks to some judiciously placed sensors.

The video stories told by Elena Galeeva (a 2022 graduate) recount the disappointing experiences of her compatriots, who are attracted by the bright lights of the West but often find themselves confronted with the icy reality of their forced landing. "With "Irina", which takes the plot of Little Red Riding Hood and adapts it to the situation of the 2000s, she creates a disillusioned fairy tale about the disappointed fantasies of a whole generation of Russian and Ukrainian exiles, where the wolves in the fable wear three-piece suits, drive Mercedes and wear Rolex on their wrists. Elena Galeeva's work is deeply rooted in a present that is buffeted by world events and transformations, but it also manages to sublimate their traumatic dimension: it definitely urges us to branch off to escape the fatality of fantasised destinies and the overly beaten paths of pre-formatted careers (2)."

For Gabriel Grillot (2023 graduate), painting is above all a perpetual search for new media, which, far from being anecdotal, becomes a source of inspiration in his practice. Most of the time, the chosen support will be the starting point for a new pictorial exploration, with the motif of an oilcloth becoming part of the dress of the painted subject in a kind of fusion between representation and incorporation of reality. The circular tarpaulin that used to cover a garden swimmingpool gave rise to a gigantic smiley face in an unusual shade of blue. What might seem at first sight to be an apology for contingency is more a sublimation of the materials that populate our daily lives and a deconstruction of the codes of painting, the artist not being a victim of his supports but simply carried along by them.

The paintings and photos of Jihye Jung (graduate 2023) deal with a banal, unspectacular everyday life. The young Korean artist is interested in objects that are becoming increasingly rare as the main subject of paintings to be found in galleries, because they are not glorious, such as bidets, washbasins and fireplaces, which she paints in a radical register, with large, well-defined flat tints, without any mannerism. When she paints bodies, it's more to expose them in their raw nudity, like this young woman urinating with her genitals wide open, or her 'corner pissers', whom she places in the very situation of their action, in

a corner of the exhibition space. Her photographs are an extension of this attention to hygiene and domestic gestures, which sets her apart and accompanies a literary production in which "ignorance of the French language becomes the crucible of daily wonder. (2) »

"As for Jingqi Yuan (2023 graduate), he resolutely seizes the opportunities offered by digital technology to recreate dual atmospheres, as in this river made up of a stream of cables linking old computer screens over which rivers of pixels "flow". The camper's tent next to this installation, from which a remixed lullaby emanates, amplifies the bucolic atmosphere, as if our future as walkers were taking shape in the limbo of this futuristic projection, a foretaste of the immersive holidays that an earlier-than-expected warming would lead us to imagine in vitro. In another video installation, the young Chinese artist reiterates this telescoping between images of undeniable contemporaneity over which scroll sentences from Taoist philosophy, like a desire to reconscientify a technology that is unaware of its origins. (2) "

Patrice Joly

(1) Magali Nachtergaele, *Quelles histoires s'écrivent dans les musées*, published by Les essais visuels, 2023.

(2) Extract from the text by Patrice Joly in the catalogue of graduates from Esad TALM Le Mans (2022-2023), *La crue soudaine de l'Ilyama*.