

Quand ça affleure à la surface – a selection of works presented by Dominique De Beir

Cathryn Boch, Pierrette Bloch, Dominique De Beir, Isabelle Ferreira, Hessie, Maëlle Labussière, Patrice Pantin.

Marie-Paule Grusenmeyer, the owner of Hopstreet Gallery in Brussels, gave me free rein to shape an exhibition at her gallery in May. I am not only a painter but also a tinkerer, surgeon, gardener and lace-maker. From time to time, I also enjoy being a curator. It forces me to take stock and sharpen my focus. What exactly am I doing today? It is both an emotional and intellectual exercise that's never easy.

"Quand ça affleure à la surface" is constructed around a central idea. I wanted to bring together works that are an extension of my world and enrich it without wondering how these choices are linked. Except, of course, through my personal gaze, which is filtered by my own work. I am interested in the coincidences created by the works and the impact they can have.

The title of the exhibition, "Quand ça affleure à la surface", comes from the crime novel *Red Harvest* (1929) by Dashiell Hammett, which was translated into French as *La Moisson Rouge* in 1932. It summarises quite well what I think it's all about: « ... *Les plans parfois, ça fonctionne. Et parfois, il suffit juste de remuer la fange... si on est assez coriace pour survivre, et si on est assez attentif pour repérer ce qu'on cherche quand ça affleure à la surface...* » "Plans are all right sometimes ... And sometimes just stirring things up is all right - if you're tough enough to survive, and keep your eyes open so you'll see what you want when it comes to the surface."

For more than 30 years, I have been exploring the surface of things by making holes in them, sometimes to the limits of the material's resistance. With this gesture, I try to break through the dimension of thickness and resist its opacity. I make holes to pierce through appearances and make images falter. Often, I have to mistreat the surface to make it dissolve and find its full vitality: something has to surface, and there has to be something underneath. I love bumps, unevenness, splotches, and stains, as well as works that vibrate and that you look at very closely. Allowing things to happen within the coincidence of what I'm doing or a gesture I'm making is and remains one of the foundations of how I work.

In the "Quand ça affleure à la surface" exhibition, I work on the raw surfaces of polystyrene, honeycomb cardboard and waxed paper. Cathryn Boch also challenges her recipient: she creates a world of pain made up of stitches, scars and repairs. Pierrette Bloch is quieter but no less corrosive: she fills the paper with dabs of ink that cause it to contract and shrink. Isabelle Ferreira strikes, tears off and relocates with great precision, thereby altering the nature of the material. Hessie glues pieces of recovered paper together without any preconceived plan. Maëlle Labussière drenches the supports with a primer of red ink that penetrates the various layers. Patrice Pantin enjoys deceiving us: the skin of the paint is applied very close to the surface.

Dominique De Beir (b. 1964, lives and works in Paris and the arrondissement Picardie Maritime). Dominique De Beir seeks the depth of the surface, wanting to hollow it out, and chooses materials that are simultaneously firm and soft. She treats the paper as a kind of skin that bears the traces of what it used to be and is ready to receive other traces that will make it look different. Through a series of manipulations, such as cutting, piercing and sanding, she makes traces and streams of colour appear until the surface is almost completely worn away. Her goal is to make the thickness tangible and help the viewer realise that there is a back surface to which they usually have no access. Sometimes, she takes the perforations to the limits of what the material can handle. She plays with an inherent ambiguity between building and destroying, opacity and transparency, durability and fragility.

Since 2023, several of her works have been included in the collections of the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Caen and the Musée Fabre in Montpellier.

Cathryn Boch (b. 1968, lives and works in Marseille). The paper supports that Cathryn Boch works on do not remain undamaged. She attacks the paper with the needle of a sewing machine until it bulges. At the same time, the fragility of the paper, the tracing paper full of holes and the proliferation of threads evoke the image of a world in the midst of change. Boch uses maps, plans, topographical images and aerial photographs as source material.

Her work can be found in private and public collections, including in Cabinet d'Arts Graphiques – Centre Georges Pompidou, FMAC (Municipal Fund of the City of Paris), FNAC (National Foundation for Contemporary Art), FRAC (Regional Fund for Contemporary Art) PACA, FRAC Picardy, MAMCO Geneva, Fondation Daniel et Florence Guerlain, and the Collection Antoine de Galbert.

Pierrette Bloch (1928-2017, lived and worked in Paris). Pierrette Bloch's work evolved towards abstraction as of the 1950s. Escaping any aesthetic category, it plays with rhythm, with the ambivalence between fullness and emptiness, and with the contrast between black and white. With great subtlety and sparing resources, it develops in sequences based on the repetition of elementary forms - dots, tangles, script - and virtually without colour.

Bloch's work has been exhibited in several major museums. It can be found in important collections, both public and private, including the MoMA in New York, the Yokohama Museum of Art in Japan, the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, and in Paris at the Fondation Louis Vuitton pour la Création, the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme, the Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'Art Moderne.

Isabelle Ferreira (b. 1972, lives and works in Paris). In her work, Isabelle Ferreira employs techniques like striking or tearing and references that she deliberately uses against the grain. As a sculptor, she uses felling and cutting to create paintings, or rather reliefs. As a draughtswoman and colourist, she consistently strips the drawing of its material integrity by cutting or tearing into it or showing only a remnant of it. Her attack distorts the image plane or tears the surface until it is reduced to bits or remnants. Scraping, slashing or tearing become processes for drawing. Colour becomes a way to bring depth to the image, and a staple can be the 'morpheme' of a shape, a skin or a colour.

Works by Ferreira are included in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Nantes, FRAC (Regional Fund for Contemporary Art) Normandy, FRAC Auvergne and FRAC Poitou-Charentes, the Josef & Anni Albers Foundation, CNAP (National Centre for Visual Arts), the Fonds d'Art Contemporain - Paris Collections, and the Fonds Graphique et Photographique of the City of Vitry-sur-Seine, among others.

Hessie (pseudonym of Carmen Lydia **Durić**) (1936-2017, lived and worked in Paris). Cuban artist Hessie is self-taught. She is known for her embroidery on fabric and multidimensional collages, in which she glues pieces of recovered paper together without any preconceived plan. Hessie spent most of her life working on the fringes of the art world. She developed a personal, minimal vocabulary using readily available, inexpensive materials and techniques associated with specifically female domestic tasks, such as sewing, embroidery and mending. Women's handicrafts have a reputation for being simplistic and archaic. To counter that reputation, Hessie developed a complex body of work that combined vulnerability and resistance. Her urge to create made her a radical innovator.

Maëlle Labussière (b. 1966, lives and works in Alfortville, France). Maëlle Labussière practices a rigorous form of painting around a single, very simple motif: the line. It offers her many, and ever new, possibilities. In her most recent paper works, in which she first appropriates the support by folding it or hiding parts of it, she creates newly composed drawings executed with spray paint, which are 'fired from close by'. We see broad spray marks or grids of fine lines. The gesture always predominates; it's short and definitive. The graphic vocabulary remains very limited: a line drawn in a single colour. Despite the economy of means - both the gesture and the medium are minimal - this work exudes a powerful, liberating energy.

Maëlle Labussière's oeuvre can be found in numerous private and public collections such as the FRAC (Regional Fund for Contemporary Art) Île de France, FRAC Normandy, the Société Générale and the City of Vitry.

Patrice Pantin (b. 1963, lives and works in Pantin, France). Like gold leaf, the technique *Encre flottante déposée sur fond frais* (Floating ink placed on a fresh surface) consists of covering a stone or block of wood with a thin layer of paint. The paint is pressed onto the object with the hands and fingers, creating a kind of mould. A layer of mist from the spray can is used to complete the imprint. Then, the print is carefully removed, flattened and 'laminated' onto firm paper. The result is a kind of 'contact image' that is stunningly realistic at times. No technology is involved, either before, during or after the process. At most, the ink has to be of good quality because Patrice Pantin is a painter. It is painting, yet it looks like photography. It is reminiscent of the technique of earlier photochromes because it looks like something from the past. It fills you with nostalgia for a lost time. The past of photography and the present of painting come together in the same image.

His *Dessins Martiaux* (Martial Drawings or Warlike Drawings) are pleated pieces of fabric, sculpted shapes or torn rags onto which paint is smeared out like a brittle, malleable fleece that carries the memory of well-chosen objects. A 'photographic' image that does not use photography's tools but the unique medium of painting. A 'click' image, an illusion made up of layers of illusions, created to confuse and, above all, to outsmart our gaze. This is what it's all about.

For this exhibition, we would like to thank the following galleries for their kind cooperation: Galerie Papillon (C. Boch); Galerie Maubert (I. Ferreira); Galerie Arnaud Lefebvre (Hessie); Galerie Réjane Louin, Locquirec (M. Labussière en P. Pantin).