

# LA MER- VEILLEUSE

Starting with a verse from the poet to better announce that there is nothing new under this sun... Because the Mediterranean first evokes a feeling of permanence, a form of equanimity that responds to the tireless and quiet back and forth of an unperturbed nature. It is sweet images that come to mind, that of an azure sky that the passing days cannot shake, that of luminous pleasures that repeat ad infinitum, that of an existence that does not know entropy. But such serenity is above all a cultural representation that was affirmed with the leisure society in the 1960s and the desire to fully enjoy holidays. The Mediterranean has thus become synonymous with hedonism and nonchalance, rest and paid vacations.

It is not surprising then that irony comes through in many of the works exhibited here. Because artists often invite us to a certain detachment from the beliefs that structure our societies, too aware that they rest above all on historical constructions that naturalize over time. In this perspective, La Merveilleuse can seem somewhat deceptive. Certainly, the sweetness of life is indeed present, but one must not be completely fooled by this seaside happiness.

Given the climatic and political issues that the Mediterranean carries within it today, it seems that this region is not simply synonymous with luxury, calm and voluptuousness. The Mediterranean has always been battered by the tumult of history. Also, like echoes of memory, there are two works on the upper floor that open onto a universe of mysteries from lost civilizations. These submerged worlds can be read as signs of our own fragility. They make us feel, in any case, that the world we know is far from immutable. In this way, our only certainty lies in the abandonment of the very idea of progress. For the rest, we entrust ourselves to the powers of the imagination and myth, the first way of creating community.

**IT IS FOUND AGAIN.  
WHAT? - ETERNITY.  
IT'S THE SEA MINGLED  
WITH THE SUN.**

*Arthur Rimbaud, May 1872*

**1****MÉLISSA EPAMINONDI***Beach (2012)*

Filmed in 2012 during the Calvi on the Rocks festival, dedicated to electronic music, *Beach* takes the form of a long tracking shot that neutrally records beach activities on the sand in the middle of summer. With its back to the sea, the camera captures reading, napping, sunbathing, and conversations that suggest the summer torpor and the annual pause. Laziness on this crowded strip of land becomes trivial and starkly shows one of the key moments of our leisure societies. In an almost anthropological mode, Méliッサ Epaminondi scrutinizes this moment that also evokes how the insular territory transforms during the tourist period under the effect of passing visitors. While it increases realism, the projection to 1:1 scale also creates an ambivalent feeling of familiarity and strangeness.

Born in 1977 in Bastia, Méliッサ Epaminondi is an artist and architect who lives between Paris and Oletta. A graduate of the Luminy Marseille School of Architecture, she develops a body of video and installation work in which environmental issues play a fundamental role.

**2****CAROLINE BELARDY***Untitled (2000)*

Deceased in 2001, at the age of forty, Caroline Belardy leaves behind a body of work full of charm and humor, where the register of the absurd asserts a breath of freedom. Belonging to both painting and sculpture, the motorcycle helmets are equipped with colored windsocks typically designed to show the direction of breeze movements. On the back of each helmet, a azure landscape provides a schematic vision of the sea. Quite carnival-like, this installation combines signs of speed and inertia while disguising an object that is still too often associated with virility. Caroline Belardy's stationary parade is like a nod to the possibilities of the imagination. In a manner that might recall the fortuitous encounter dear to the surrealists, the amusing juxtaposition between the motorcycle helmets and the windsocks brings out a contradiction that outpaces the mind and seems to suggest not sticking to this paradox. It remains to be seen what the visitor will make of this art of the feint when the absence of a title asserts radical autonomy and the desire to explain nothing.

1961 Algiers – 2001 Ajaccio. A graduate of the National School of Fine Arts in Lyon in 1991, she developed a body of work based on the testimony of journeys, encounters, and everything that surrounds us and sometimes even overwhelms us.

**3****ALAIN SÉCHAS***Naked with a Parasol (2017)*

Known for his cat-headed characters, Alain Séchas depicts situations that are at once tragic and comical, mundane and playful, which form the fabric of our everyday lives. Straddling between comic strips and high art, caricatures and noble paintings, the beach scenes demonstrate his sharp and detached view of our lifestyles. His dexterity in line allows him to describe synthetic details that captivate the viewer with their evident and derisive nature. The vertically stretched format

of the canvas here contradicts the horizontality of the beach and emphasizes the gangling character of the cat woman. The stylized silhouette carries within it a discreet discomfort that alone signifies a gentle caricature of the middle classes. The jubilant work of Alain Séchas is also a true pictorial exercise through a rapid gestural treatment that abolishes the strict difference between planes, plays with certain transparencies with the protagonist and her towel, and lets the acrylic become autonomous as shown by the highlights of white depicting the brilliant summer light.

Born in 1955 in Colombes, Alain Séchas is one of the most prominent French artists on the international art scene. He has been exhibiting his works since 1984. He is known for his drawings, sculptures, paintings, videos and installations, which are present in numerous public collections.

**4****SERGE COMTE***Waterproof (2004)*

Serge Comte's works often make use of low-quality materials from our post-industrial societies, such as post-it notes, plastic beads, or here, Lego bricks. Operating in a DIY (Do It Yourself) mode, they present an evident simplicity that harks back to both childhood and amateur practices. These two portraits show a man and a woman in bathing suits. In the absence of context, their identity remains in suspense. The two characters could just as well integrate into a fiction as refer to existing figures. The title here recalls one of the characteristics of the component of these sculptures is water resistance. But in this case, this quality could also designate the couple, suggesting then a more pictorial and sarcastic meaning.

Born in 1966 in La Tronche, Serge Comte is a French artist who lives and works between Paris, Grenoble and Reykjavik (Iceland). A graduate of the Grenoble School of Art in 1995, he is both a videographer and a visual artist whose work consists of transgenre figures and self-portraits made with everyday materials.

**5****MARTHE WÉRY***Blue the Island (2004)*

An unwavering defender of abstract art, Marthe Wéry asserts a vocabulary steeped in minimalism where monochrome and repetition contribute to a "progressive decomposition of form". The various panels emphasize the dissolution of the uniqueness of the painting, forever unfinished. The distinct blues that cover each aluminum rectangle then assert the material character of the color. The artist even notes that her "work is an elementary way of experiencing the surface". Marthe Wéry's practice is often intense, creating a tension, far from the calm that a distracted observation of her monochromes might suggest. She manages to reconcile an approach that is both impersonal and intimate, distant and vibrant. Where the opposition between modernist autonomy and minimal art seemed irreconcilable in the 1960s, the painter takes a tangent by giving light a fundamental role that binds the elements. *Bleu l'île* thus contributes to the creation of an atmosphere where the panels integrate with the space and architecture to better allow the allusive evocation of an insular and maritime context through its title.

1930 – 2005 Brussels (Belgium), Marthe Wéry is a major

Belgian artist recognized on the international scene. In 1982, she represented Belgium at the Venice Biennale. Both an artist and a teacher at the Saint-Luc Institute in Brussels, she has trained many artists including Anne Veronica Janssens.

6

## SYLVIE FANCHON

*Decorative Blue and Red Monochrome (2009)*

With the ready-made, the monochrome is one of the most radical gestures of modernity. Pushing the logic of abstraction to its limit, it proposes a uniform color surface that abandons all principles of spatial composition. In this case, Sylvie Fanchon's flat blue does however allow us to see an irregular red outline that draws inside like the frame of the painting. This illusionistic form thus creates an ambiguity: it represents a frame, which introduces an element of figuration at the heart of an abstraction. In addition, it evokes a decorative device when modernist monochrome historically opposes in the most obvious way any ornamental dimension. Sylvie Fanchon's work constitutes a visual witz, an ironic form that unfolds around an impossible contradiction to resolve. The pool blue, used by the painter, translates this ambivalence and places itself in the tradition of the incoherent arts of the 1880s. Indeed, Alphonse Allais had proposed as early as 1887 solid color backgrounds with mocking titles, like this Harvest of tomatoes by apoplectic cardinals on the edge of the Red Sea or this Astonishment of young recruits seeing your azure for the first time, o Mediterranean. Here is a renewed version just as mocking.

1959 Nairobi (Kenya) - 2023 Paris. A professor at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Sylvie Fanchon carried out work that was both that of a painter and a researcher, precise, demanding, and always evolving. Her work clearly raises the question of the subject in painting and its perception by multiplying erudite references to art history, without emphasis, while introducing "motifs" from a widespread imagery (particularly from comic books and cartoons).

7

## PHILIPPE CAZAL

*Wonderful (1986-2003)*

A neon sign both direct and enigmatic, effective and deceptive, Philippe Cazal's work borrows its codes from the world of advertising to better subvert them. The use of the Futura typeface, exemplary of the modernity advocated by the Bauhaus in the 1920s, here becomes somewhat obsolete and shows the standardized appropriation of a history that can be primarily considered as a repertoire of forms. Thus, the geometric letters are no longer an original expression, but present themselves as the quotation of a vocabulary from the past. The feminine adjective then designates no being or object. It becomes the empty qualifier of what belongs to a supernatural and magical universe. From the Latin 'mirabilia', referring to astonishing and admirable things, Philippe Cazal's neon word turns on itself, opening up to all hypotheses and interpretations. The clarity of the work nonetheless creates a sort of semantic trap for the viewer.

Born in 1948 in La Redorte in Aude, Philippe Cazal graduated from the École nationale supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris (1969-1973). His creative field has extended to advertising,

communication, or marketing. His name is included in many French public collections (Centre Pompidou MAMC Saint-Etienne, FNAC, FRAC(s) etc.) and European (Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Porin Taidemuseo in Finland).

8

## EMILIJA ŠKARNULYTE

*Sunken Cities (2011)*

Emilija Škarnulyte reappropriates the figure of the mermaid on the occasion of the discovery of a sunken city in the Mediterranean. A top resort for centuries, Baia was favored by the Roman elite. Located above natural volcanic vents, the city was famous for its medicinal hot springs which were located all around the city and on which it was easy to build hydrotherapy centers. By 1500, the remains of the once luxurious city were abandoned and the water level slowly rose due to the same volcanic vents that were once an attraction to the region.

An archaeological testament to a vanished civilization, *Sunken Cities* engages the physical performance of the artist, adept at monofin diving, to invite the viewer to meditate on the fragility of human societies and project them into an uncertain time where past and future converge. The supernatural dimension of the mermaid drifts the documentary towards fiction and adds a touch of mystery that brings history and myth together.

Born in Lithuania in 1987, Emilija Škarnulyte graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Brera, Milan, and the Academy of Contemporary Art in Tromsø, Norway. She was the winner of the 2019 Future Generation Art Prize organized by the PinchukArtcentre in Kiev. Blending documentary and fiction, her work is based on immersive installations where myth, history, and prospecting converge. Cosmic and geological dimensions are most often associated to trace a perspective that is both political and social.

9

## CLAUDIO PARMIGGIANI

*Untitled (1977)*

Following in the footsteps of Arte Povera, Claudio Parmiggiani's work employs simple materials, often ready-mades, to create mental images. Memory, travel, and time are at the heart of his practice, which carries an almost romantic vein. The reuse of ancient sculptures is emblematic of a poetics where mystery takes on a mystical quality.

In the present case, a model ship sails on a plaster face that evokes the lost Greco-Roman world. The assemblage conveys a certain nostalgia by evoking a submerged civilization. As an oneiric image, the installation is directly related to a later piece in the FRAC Corsica collection, *Shipwreck with Spectator* created by the artist for the church of the Morsiglia convent in 2009. It is a large boat measuring 14.8 meters long and 3.8 meters wide, built in 1932 in Genoa, which was found in Sardinia and transported to Corsica, then cut into three parts to fit through the church's narrow entrance measuring only 1.7 meters wide. The viewer can thus wander among the pieces of the carcass, which presents itself as a vestige of a bygone era.

Born in 1943 in Luzzara, Claudio Parmiggiani is an Italian artist associated with the Arte Povera movement. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Modena in 1960 and was also trained in Giorgio Morandi's workshop in Bologna during that

decade. Contemporary with Mario Merz, Giuseppe Penone, and Michelangelo Pistoletto, his work questions the place of man, memory, and destruction.

**10**

**ÉTIENNE BOSSUT**

*Clouds (2001)*

Etienne Bossut's practice is based on the polyester molding of objects from our everyday life. They become three-dimensional representations that question our relationship to reality and play with the ambiguity between material object and visual sign. Positioned equidistantly between Marcel Duchamp's ready-mades and classical trompe-l'oeil, his works contribute to the postmodern reflection on simulacra and the principle that our physical world has become inseparable from the signs that denote it. Recalling American minimal art through the repetition of the same elements, Etienne Bossut's sculptures reveal a certain irony, as seen in these inflatable mattresses that evoke the casualness of beach leisure. Suspended from the ceiling in a mischievous reversal, these objects, typically made of plastic, are rigid here, yet still convey a sense of lightness. The clouds-as-mattresses represent an improbable encounter between the sky and the sea, showing that any poetics begins with an art of displacement, however simple it may be.

Born in 1946 in Saint-Chamond, Etienne Bossut is a French artist who graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts in Saint-Étienne in 1970. Since the 1980s, his sculptures of everyday objects, created through polyester molding, have been featured in various solo exhibitions, including at CRAC Langue- doc-Roussillon, the Museum of Fine Arts in Nancy, Mamco in Geneva, and many others. His works are present in numerous public collections.

