

Press Release
Arthur Marie

Onsen Confidential

Kayokuyuki Gallery, Tokyo

April 7-21, 2024

Among the five pieces by Arthur Marie at the Kayokoyuki Gallery in Tokyo, only one bears a name: “Declassé“, the title to a portrait depicting a faceless body bleeding into its background. The clinical title may provide a framework for the surrounding artworks left “Untitled“. These paintings evoke a sense of a dust-covered European familiarity: Two “untitled“ portraits reminiscent of the 19th-century bourgeoisie-encouraged painterly pursuit of likeness. A gradually abstract “untitled“ interpretation of a somehow eerily common image depicting a leisurely stroll on a beach with an aura entrenched in the rigidity of Napoleonic social etiquette. An “untitled“ scene of dancing, perhaps.

Positioned between traditional portraiture and the character design for the zombies in *The Walking Dead*, «Declassé» sits in a space that challenges the ambition of portraiture: the acknowledgment of a body.

Arthur Marie’s catalog can be looked at as a construction of a vast contemporary typology. Within it, he meticulously examines the social role of nuance within self-representation and the portrayal of others in the historical narrative of image production. Through his “post-cliché“ approach to painting, he seems not only to delve into optical nuances that define class thresholds but the legibility of them - the ability to decode the nuance. These paintings neither assert definitive statements nor propose solutions; instead, they appear suspended in a liminal stage, just before the coalescence of a fully formed image.

Because of this, there exists a tension between the attempt to capture these images and a simultaneous dismissal of them just as they become graspable. I am inclined to read them as a statement, that says, that the allure of incomplete legibility verges on a lack of catharsis - a structural „if-only.“ Like a runway show presented through frosted glass or an image frozen midway through digital fabrication. Marie’s paintings are an observational thread blended together, forgotten about, left to simmer under the sun, left to mold, rot and dry up: declassification, “Declassé“.

— Leo Elia Jung

Convivial Activity

Fitzpatrick Gallery, Paris

November 30, 2023 - January 13, 2024

Arthur easily admits wanting to distance himself from the feverish cold that developed in his early paintings, expecting a less perfect, clinical image, to move towards a non-place; rather an emotional situation. His work isn't autobiographical; it draws from an imprecise environment, a vague principle. He says himself hypothetical events. Something that implies alienation, loss, that is connected to a sense of duty; school, labor, to a system of production that we already know. From what we possess before it is taken away from us. Something that loses its erotic charge, that becomes lucid. That leads to depression, loneliness, and illness.

Convivial Activity follows *Serenity and Struggle For Pleasure*. It's Arthur's first solo exhibition in France. It quotes a series of paintings he presented in New York earlier this year; a series of invented profiles in insensitive light, on a grey background. In an email he had sent to the gallery Director where he was exhibiting them, he expressed feeling frustrated with the idea of a portrait as a defined event, needing instead to follow an intention through multiples, through variations; as industrial prototypes, standard of beauty, or even psychological.

The exhibition is a series of twenty-one portraits conceived as a single work. They are as much portraits of family members displayed on a dresser as they could be mugshots, morgue photographs, or classic iPhone selfies. None of them apply to a face in memory, none. Rather a combination of several reassembled remembrances, as one would do to generate a composite sketch. The texture of each painting is worked in such a way that it resembles skin; smooth and irregular. A superposition of about ten layers. They record, classify, measure, exclude, sort. Something that has to do with lies, with the idea of a correction. That repeats itself with an objective. Pale, frail bodies. They are a bit melancholic.

Something that is arbitrary; that of an individual who finds himself in a space that is not his own, and from which he realizes the subordination to which he is subjected; to a standardization of structural violence. A repetition of these anonymous faces to the point of erasure; the loss of what is of value, what is deserving, mortal.

In his personal notes, Arthur mentions this periphery. What is reasonable, what submits, what converges, what corrupts, and what is demagogic. A portrait that would be young and old, poor and rich, disgusted nevertheless. The scene of a latent, intrusive, almost surgical repulsion. Of fatigue. Of misery; a sexual pessimism, a feeling of lack, and the absence of an envy.

— Hugo Bausch Belbachir

Serenity

Queer Thoughts, New-York

April 5 - May 20, 2023

As I'm swiping through snapshots of variations on *Portrait of a Young Man* (on the forever cracked screen of my retirement-age phone) forming their way to completion, my mind, prone to astral journeys (this will imminently become relevant), is off somewhere else thinking repeatedly about vitalistic fantasies. This, of course, is the term that Isabelle Graw ascribes to painting with its Sisyphean task of producing (with various degrees of success or failure) that false fantasy of liveness, and which I in turn keep fantasising about as the young man whose portrait(s) is in the palm of my hand keeps eschewing my wanton, searching gaze.¹

It would be more honest to call Arthur Marie's latest serial works 'profiles' rather than portraits. For rather than even attempting some lazy half-truth, a less-than-sincere stab at veracity, Marie's paintings are host to well-digested, mutant amalgamations of mugshots, before-and-after photos of reconstructive or plastic surgery patients, elements of the artist's own visage (I won't go so far as to reduce it to self-portraiture) and other anonymous sources gleaned online, which make up his forever-growing image bank of 'types'. Morphed together in hazy Photoshopped assemblages or preparatory drawings to create anonymous facial composites, these are then laboriously transferred on to canvas with layers upon layers of oil paint. The canvas itself is prepared in advance with gesso and then manically, obsessively sanded for hours straight to achieve a stone-smooth, matte finish not unlike that of the carefully powdered face of a waxy cadaver.

Contours are blurred, liveness is just a word that I type, serenity is a false friend, and the space-time continuum is most definitely out of whack. Set within a non-descript non-place rendered in shades of grey – the only point of fixity that Marie allows for, that and the sitter's white T-shirt – the kid in question, let's call them "Exhibit A", is depicted in various states of to-and-fro alteration à la Benjamin Button but without the teleological linearity of the latter. In this 21st century spin on an Old Master portrait gallery, preferably Dutch or Flemish given the cool tonalities of Marie's palette, *Portrait of a Young Man* maintains their distant stare, face turned resolutely to the right in each and every composition. Yet from one painting to the next, their skin appears slightly more, or less, crumpled. The typical emo haircut of teenagers the world over, thick dark hair swept across the face, a prosthetic shield against the cruelty of whatever lies outside, here shows more, or less, of a receding hairline and then ultimately disappears. Ageless but ageing, foreign but always on the edge of familiarity, the effect is eerily reminiscent of images resulting from AI-powered facial motion capture, or machine learning, with as much interiority as the nameless alien masquerading behind the façade of a femme fatale bombshell in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013). A prototype never reaching finality, a schema for what could or might be, but never fully is.

— Anya Harrison

Queer Thoughts presents *Serenity*, a solo exhibition by Arthur Marie. Arthur Marie (b. 1996, Cherbourg, FR) lives and works in Paris, France. Recent exhibitions include *Plymouth Rock*, Zurich (solo); *The Residence Gallery*, London; *Palais Carli*, Marseille and *Basel Social Club*, Basel. This is the artist's first solo exhibition in New York City.

¹ Isabelle Graw, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium*, Sternberg Press, 2018

Struggle for Pleasure

Plymouth Rock, Zurich

May 6 - June 4, 2022

The works of Arthur Marie, small and strict, furtive and fetish, are deeply rooted in the now through the past. Their old master varnished surfaces speak to that which society stores in its dusty museums and awakens in the darkness of film and video games and the corporate product of the corner store. Five centuries ago the Vanitas slipped the beautiful past the moral majority, whose equivalent now demands paintings of perceived lived experience alone. The rotting in those Dutch paintings links here to reminders of passing time, memories and our limited corporality. Stripped of color and saturation, they are not excuses for the beautiful, but institutional depictions of the interior and here. Loneliness and Sisyphus, sometimes cousins, become mirrored portraits. Closely cropped, all appear within spaces straddling public and private. Figurative, but the figure gone, coming or never showed up. This is a narrative of setting alone. With the Vanitas each object spoke to the experience of life in relation to others, here the objects are clearly coded for the creator and yet open to decipher for all. Specific pies, equipment, spilled seed - universal and personal in a world so stripped by the digital and the daily runaround and recent years of canceled planning. Has the voyeuristic ever been so sexless? In these private moments captured in labored time beauty materializes in alienated dreams.

— Mitchell Anderson

Anna Solal, Arthur Marie

Lily Robert Gallery, Paris

July 7-31, 2022

I arrived in Paris when Money Gallery's Certain Times was still on view at Lily Robert. This was June, and nothing certain was scheduled for the dead season yet. I approached Anna Solal with an idea of doing a real fast production, and she suggested showing Arena from her solo at Britta Rettberg in Munich and to invite Arthur Marie with a few paintings, which sounded like a fast and easy exhibition scenario. I was aware of Arthur's work since around 2016, when my gallery partner Anna Teterkina suggested including his work in the first show I attempted to curate — Penguin Island loosely based on L'Île des Pingouins by Anatole France. Back then Arthur mailed his piece to New York, but it was probably lost in the mail. Later on I heard someone seeing his piece hanging in the apartment of the gallerist I tried to work with in those days. I hope it's still in good hands.

A roughly dozen layers of gesso is applied on a single canvas and polished with fine grit sandpaper. Then it's pencils and water to even it all out. After finally seeing Arthur's paintings in person, it became clear to me that we should rather pair them with Anna Solal's unexhibited work instead of recycling her solo show material, and to focus on drawing as well. I'd like her work to speak for itself.

Overall there are seven pieces downstairs plus some bonus work in the office. Arthur's procedural note is on your right side when you enter the gallery. Emergency evacuation plan forever: «3 months ago, after making a series of portrait sketches (you've seen some of them), I had in mind to translate them into sculpture. I'm really interested in prosthetics in general, movie makeup prosthetics, wax mannequins that you find in the Tussaud museums, distorted Chris Cunningham bodies, Medardo Rosso et c. et c. At first I wanted to use the mannequin heads only as props for my paintings. It will maybe change at some point but I had this idea to make realistic portraits of mannequins. I like portraits but I wouldn't dare to ask someone to pose for me, it doesn't suit my interests and I find it more appealing conceptually and creatively to play with inanimate bodies/toys. Basically this drawing is a table, I was hesitant about what technique and material to use to make heads. It wasn't easy for me but I had to weigh the pros and cons. It's not a concern for me nowadays but I was stupidly worried about the longevity and the solidity of each te...»

—Ilya Smirnov