Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to dedicate a fourth exhibition to the artist Jérôme Zonder, his second in Brussels since 2016. On this occasion, the artist –regarded as one of the greatest representatives of contemporary drawing– presents a series of portraits: spaces of graphical collision in which a variety of stylistic regimes unfold a psychic world in full transformation. These ‘studies’ are a continuation of his research into the adolescence of Pierre-François, a fictional character borrowed from Marcel Carné’s film *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945) and a recurring figure in his work. From the small formats that function as ‘source images’ to the large compositions that together make up this multitude of expressions, it is possible to glimpse, beyond the scope of the personal, a view of humanity in the Anthropocene era.

Over the past twenty years, Jérôme Zonder has developed a polygraphic system that takes as its subject the portrait, bringing into coincidence the question of representation and that relating to identity. The challenge, here, is to find a form that not only represents the subject but that also embodies it. This quest for the perfect line is achieved through graphic approaches whose diversity reflects the complexity of the relationship with both oneself and the world: hyperrealist or comic book style line drawing, almost printlike use of patterns, flat areas in charcoal powder, geometrical clarity, monochrome or abysmal emptiness... This diversity in drawing is linked to various types of images drawn from a common visual culture: historical archives, iconic paintings, film fragments, symbols and metonymic details that form a narrative entanglement, testifying to a compulsive but nonetheless healthy relationship with the images of our time.

Paradoxically, the choice of a limited number of means also contributes to the deepening of the subject, to the enhancement of its expression: the typical black and white embodies both the historical memory and the grey matter of the character, while the graphite leaves on the paper surface traces of one of the main molecular components of the human body: carbon.
In this way, Jérôme Zonder’s portraits unveil all the external forces that permeate and determine the human being and make tangible his physical constitution, at times atom by atom. Indeed, it is not uncommon for the carrier to assume the appearance of flesh, like a skin that has not healed properly, as in the Portraits of Adolescents.

As such, the adolescence of Pierre-François becomes de facto the terrain of a mutation, of an assertion of the drawing and particularly that of a clash between all these contradictory intensities. From a graphical point of view, the artist’s intention is to ‘to abandon the comfort of the image’ to bring about an imbalance in the drawing. Indeed, the exhibition presents three portraits of Pierre-François as a harlequin, all of them based on a visual tension, resulting from a friction between different figures and tonal ruptures. In the first, it is evidenced in the rigour of the grid and the sharp diagonals that contrast with a hunched over, irresolute body, buckling under the accumulation of elements; in the second, it is the very basis of the drawing that becomes acrobatic, as Pierre-François is seen resting on the point of a triangle, while in the third, he is found standing head to tail. This sense of vertigo culminates in a work that is literally turned upside down, stripped of all structural components and saturated with imported elements: it is the most explicit and assertive entry into Pierre-François’s ‘grey matter’ and all the struggles it is subjected to.

This ‘hysterical dichotomy’ is further enhanced by an underlying violence, which finds its source in the memorial dimension of the works. A complex play of reminiscences, echoes and visual quotations emerges in an aesthetic that is reminiscent of collage and Cubism. While several of these elements function as allusions to traumatic events in our history (anxiogenic crowds, threatening shadows), Jérôme Zonder further expands this materialisation of a collective unconscious through cut-outs in which only the form of a theme touched upon elsewhere is preserved. A retinal significance emphasised by the many eyes that punctuate the exhibition.

In keeping with the dark humour of the title, ‘Jusqu’ici tout va bien’, the cynical distortion of sources of inspiration arises from the same clash of contrasts. Here, however, the world of childhood appears in all its ambiguous gloom: Harlequin takes on the appearance of a hooded hostage, while children’s books are brought to life in the form of a nightmarish rabbit.

As a true artisan of the image, Jérôme Zonder affirms yet again that drawing is above all ‘thought that is practised with the hand’, prone to perpetual expansion.
For any further information, please contact Valérie Wille
valerie@nathalieobadia.com / +32 (0)2 648 14 05

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**Galerie Nathalie Obadia**
**Paris**
**Shahpour Pouyan**
**Benoît Maire**

**Group Show**
From September 9, 2021

**Jérôme Zonder**
**Robert Kushner**
**Shahpour Pouyan**
**Benoît Maire**

**Galerie Nathalie Obadia**
**Brussels**
**Charles Decoster**
**Jérôme Zonder**
**Shahpour Pouyan**

**Galerie Nathalie Obadia**
**Paris**
**Robert Kushner**
**Robert Kushner**
**Mickalene Thomas**

**Jusqu’ici tout va bien**
September 7 - October 23, 2021

**Benoît Maire - Ker Xavier**
September 4 - Octobre 23, 2021