

10 September – 22 October 2022

Some injunctions are more like a slap in the face and even the best advice can turn out to be contrary to common sense. You can understand this injunction to *Dream On* in two different ways, either as telling us that something will forever remain outside our grasp, or more literally as an encouragement not to give up on our dreams. And so the question is, is this show promising to rid us of our illusions, or to get rid of the world itself? It has to be said that Pierre Ardouvin has always had a knack for finding titles that can be interpreted in many different ways. *Dream On* could also be the title of a hit pop song, the soundtrack of a road movie whose heroes are driving through the night, one of those fake cinematic nights shot during the day but underexposed and tinted blue. And for this new exhibition at Praz-Delavallade, the gallery is indeed immersed in a day-for-night effect where blue reigns triumphant. The walls resonate with a dream of a sky that helps Pierre Ardouvin's dreams to emerge from limbo, because of course the gentleman dreams – it's his system of defence. And as the gallery's central pillar surrounded with cushions reminds us, sandbags are used to protect monuments in countries at war. Illustrating and advocating dreams as a form of resistance, *Nuits noires* – like three little tableaux vivants in a child's theatre show – are surreal scenes set against a fabric sky where sequins play the role of stars. A stag stands on a bed, its antlers turned to face us; a house in ruins is placed on a bed next to a palm tree; and, on top of another bed, a tin soldier lies on a table under which a goat has taken shelter. This ensemble of what could be children's toys has been cast in bronze making them safe from the clumsy hands of toddlers, safe to live on for eternity in their pseudo miniature cosmos. "How the night grows when dreams come together" as Gaston Bachelard said in *The Poetics of Reverie*. It is these three pieces that welcome us as we enter, and then everything teeters. Clouds, wonderful clouds transformed by pareidolia into precious little canvases, metamorphose in turn into a kiss, a sleeping figure, a heart/tree, a whale, a clown and an elephant. In Ardouvin's *Écrans de veille* (screen saver) series, the world definitively slips out from under our feet. Revisited with a caustic twist, these postcards of days gone seem to point to disasters to come. The artist marries two images, placing one above and one below and then disturbs the happy moment with watercolour, sparkly resin and splashes of gouache. A purple twilight gently

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gnaws away at a swimming pool in the mountains; ruins appear in the bowels of the Earth at the foot of a Ferris wheel that no longer turns; exuberant flowers are born from a swooping roller coaster; a herd of Highland cows graze in front of (or perhaps in the depths of) a peaceful lake; and mimosas trickle down the rocks in Fontainebleau. As the title reminds us, this is how it was in *Le monde d'avant* (the world before). Screens and smoke: it's decidedly blue as one dream follows another on the wall, worried and worrying odes to a past paradise that everything threatened, but which remained unaware of the danger. The Sixties turned everything into a picture postcard, so sure was the decade of its ability to lead us towards a better future in glorious Technicolour. This world (glorified by famous French postcard publisher Yvon) is that place we have never visited – because we know what comes next.

*Since the 1990's, Pierre Ardouvin (b. 1955, FR) has steadily cultivated a reflection on popular culture's utopic vernacular and the fate of its ritual consumption of commodities – spanning industries, class relationships and identities. Ardouvin's astute use of appropriation and re-presentation of everyday objects exercises a poetic scrutiny of individual and collective psyches. Ardouvin's multidisciplinary undertaking challenges the credibility of archetypes with playful and poignant installations, environments, assemblages, collages and drawings. Pierre Ardouvin's works have been shown at the Palais de Tokyo (Paris), the MAC/VAL (Vitry), the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, the Fondation Jumex (Mexico), the Mori Art Museum (Tokyo), the NMCA (Seoul) and are represented in numerous public and private collections internationally. Pierre Ardouvin has numerous monographic catalogues including *Retour d'Abyssinie*, published by La Banque in 2018; *Helpless*, by Villa Saint Clair Editions published in 2015; *Eschatologic Park*, published by Les Presses du Réel in 2010. In 2016, the MAC VAL dedicated a monographic exhibition to him entitled «Tout est affaire de décor», and in 2022 to present «A mains nues». Since September 2018, a series of unpublished works are presented at TOPAZ Arts, New York.*

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