

Marc Padeu

*Dans la plantation*

March 9 – April 6, 2023

Opening reception Thursday, March 9, 5 – 8 PM

Peres Projects is pleased to present *Dans la plantation*, Marc Padeu's (b. 1990 in Melong, Cameroon) second solo exhibition with the gallery and his first in Milan.

With this new body of work, Marc Padeu pursues his pictorial exploration of Cameroon's agricultural regions, which began in a banana plantation in Njombé-Penja, and now takes us to a cacao plantation a few kilometers from Yaoundé. Informed both by his predilection for the Old Masters of European painting and by his personal approach to composition, based on reenactment and photography, Marc Padeu composes a series of works which sublimes the quotidian.

While bringing to the fore those usually left in the shadows of a globalized product consumed around the world, Padeu's paintings do not depict work scenes. Instead, the artist shares moments of rest and get-together. While the setting has changed, the scenes he depicts show couples and groups in conversation, that are reminiscent of his earlier works. In Padeu's hands the plantation becomes a metaphor for life: sowing, cultivating, tending, harvesting; and starting over. Season after season, the work in the plantation mirrors the cycles of life. From one painting to another Padeu's oeuvre reveals itself as an investigation into the passing of life, the artist collecting and archiving precious moments of existence like cacao leaves in a herbarium.

Passionate about history, Marc Padeu is a chronicler. Narration is central to his practice in which each work encapsulates a story. In *Dans la plantation*, a same scene is sometimes depicted from different angles in order to expand the limits of the canvas and develop a storyline. Painting from experience, Padeu uses photographs in which he meticulously recreates, on location, scenes he has witnessed. More than a mere mnemonic support, this process lends a photographic quality to the paintings, as evidenced by their singular framings. Although restaged, his compositions radiate spontaneity; pieced together, they evoke an album of snapshots which emanates fellowship and intimacy.

An acute observer, Marc Padeu approaches painting from a naturalistic standpoint, which he enhances, and sometimes subverts, with an intense and arresting palette of colors. The iridescent foliage which thrives across canvases is inspired by an Impressionist use of colors. Enlarged to dimensions more reminiscent of history painting than genre painting, Padeu's works turn simple moments into noteworthy events in our individual and intimate lives. They exude a rare, almost palpable intensity. Just like each cacao pod painted by Padeu has a unique shape and hue, the familiar moments freeze-framed by the artist all have their own coloration and significance. Drawing on a nearly documentary approach to his field of investigation as well as on his in-depth knowledge of centuries of experimentation with figuration, Padeu translates facets of ordinary life in contemporary Cameroon into works firmly rooted within our shared art history. Cultivating togetherness and sharing, Padeu's large-format canvases magnify relatable fragments of daily life which resonate far beyond the Cameroonian plantation.

This is Marc Padeu's second solo exhibition with Peres Projects and his first in our Milan space. His work has been featured in several institutional exhibitions, including a solo exhibition at Doual'art – Centre d'art contemporain, Douala, and group exhibitions at the Galerie Nationale d'Art Contemporain de Yaoundé, Yaounde and the Musée National de Yaoundé, Yaounde. Marc Padeu has also presented solo exhibitions at Cromwell Place, London, Peres Projects, Berlin, and Jack Bell Gallery, London. His work is currently featured in the major group exhibition *When We See Us: A Century of Black Figuration in Painting* at the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) in Cape Town. Padeu's work recently entered the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario in Canada.

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