

Alexis Ralaivao

Daily Blur

15.09.2026

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MASSIMODECARLO Pièce Unique is pleased to present *Daily Blur*, Alexis Ralaivao's first exhibition with the gallery – two new paintings about presence and absence, and about what an image can keep of what is no longer there.

Everything Ralaivao paints comes from his own life, and often by accident – a photograph taken for some other reason entirely, with no thought of painting. He is drawn, again and again, to what sits at the edge of visibility: a transparency, a reflection, a shadow, something half-remembered. The two paintings gathered here hold that instinct in two keys – one cool and grey, one warm with colour.

The larger announces its own paradox in its title: *J'ai acheté des fleurs pour les peindre, je n'ai peint que leurs ombres* – *I bought flowers to paint them, I painted only their shadows*. A glass of water and an emptied espresso cup rest on a white cloth, and beneath them spreads a soft, dark bloom of shade in which petals, a stem, a leaning stalk slowly declare themselves. The flowers had sat on the artist's table one morning and cast this shadow across it and it was the shade, not the bloom, that he chose to keep. "You can guess that there is flowers," he says, "but you don't see them."

Ralaivao is self-taught. Based in Rennes (France), he came to painting through intensive, independent study of its history. From the Dutch Golden Age he takes the patient, near-obsessive attention of Johannes Vermeer and Gerard ter Borch, and their tenderness toward cloth, glass, metal and skin. From twentieth-century Italy, the cropped and magnified everyday of Domenico Gnoli and, above all, the hushed still-life devotion of Giorgio Morandi. "Maybe it was better not to know anything," he says of teaching himself – less a rejection of this lineage than a licence to enter it on his own terms, answerable to no one but his own eye.

Beside this grey world hangs its opposite: a smaller canvas, warm-skinned, a string of red beads at a bare throat. It belongs to another current in his painting – the colour, the closeness – and to an ordinary evening: his partner trying on a necklace. Cropped close, the face lifted out of frame, it holds the warmth

of the moment it was taken. One canvas is absence; the other, presence. Together they form the two halves of how he sees: the empty table and the beloved neck.

And then there is a third element that remains unseen. On the back of every canvas, Ralaivao writes by hand – fast, unplanned, "whatever is on my mind" the day he finally lets the work go. Where the front is built in slow, deliberate layers, the back is spilled in a single breath. He began because signing and dating felt "too cold, just to sign and send them away"; he wanted "something more, and something secret," a few lines meant only for whoever comes to live with the painting. A diary, sealed to the wall.

What unites the two works, in the end, is an impulse to keep. A shadow saved where a flower stood; an ordinary evening held in a string of red beads; a few words hidden on the reverse of a canvas. Each is an act of preservation, holding something fast before it slips away – not the thing itself, but what it leaves behind: a trace, a warmth, a mark. These are the smallest, most fleeting things, and for Ralaivao the ones most worth holding on to.

Alexis Ralaivao

Alexis Ralaivao was born in 1991 in Rennes, France, where he currently lives and works.

Ralaivao makes oil paintings built from scenes of everyday life - a draped shirt, a hand at rest, a glass on a table. His technique draws on 17th-century Dutch genre painting, especially Johannes Vermeer and Gerard ter Borch, and their attention to fabric and light. A self-taught artist, he draws on an ongoing, wide-ranging study of the history of painting, photography, antiques and French literature. His early paintings dwelt on the textures of the domestic interior, rendered in muted, near-monochrome tones. His more recent work turns instead to scenes of formalwear, fine dining and jewelry, using them to explore consumption and exclusion, increasingly in blocks of saturated, vibrant colour. Across both bodies of work, he builds his surfaces in thin, careful layers, using light to slow the image down and hold the viewer's attention on a single, ordinary gesture.

His work is held in the collections of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, United States; the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, United States; the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, France; the Powerlong Museum, China; and the He Art Museum, China.

Artworks

Alexis Ralaivao

J'ai acheté des fleurs pour les peindre, je n'ai peint que leurs ombres, 2026

Oil on canvas

200 × 150 cm / 78 2/3 × 59 1/5 inches

Alexis Ralaivao

Le collier rouge de Karlyne, 2026

Oil on canvas

40 × 50 cm / 15 6/8 × 19 3/4 inches