

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUXELLES

JÉRÔME ZONDER

Des Homo Sapiens

April 6th - May 27th 2018

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, 75004 - Paris



Les fruits de Baptiste #2, 2018

Graphite on paper

24 × 32 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is very pleased to present *Des Homo Sapiens (Some Home Sapiens)*, Jérôme Zonder's first exhibition at the Paris gallery.

Following a fruitful collaboration with the Brussels gallery in 2016, *Des Homo Sapiens* signals Jérôme Zonder's entrance into Galerie Nathalie Obadia's program, via an immersive exhibition, which is a follow-up to his notable projects at the Museum Tinguely in Basel (*The Dancing Room*, 2017), at the Maison Rouge (*Fatum*, 2015) and at the Lieu Unique (*Au Village (In the Village)*, 2014).

Born in 1974, in Paris, Jérôme Zonder has spent the last twenty or so years developing a consummate body of work centered on the constantly reinvented practice of drawing. The artist's unique mastery of his medium, of which he mobilizes the resources in order to establish a true polygraphy, along with the singularity of his historical and sociological approach make Jérôme Zonder one of the most interesting French artists of his generation.

A vast, spatio-temporal fresco, *Des Homo Sapiens* transforms the rooms of rue du Cloître Saint-Merri into a graphic and symbolic Gallery of Evolution, leading the viewer toward the dawn of a new age, where the ultimate destination remains elusive.

Going from black to white, from the densest concentration to the most radical emptiness, the spectator advances through a space of representations that leads him from mimetic photorealism to informal abstraction, an introductory route that may well announce the end of an Anthropocene, worn out by the excesses of industrial capitalism and by the advent of a new branch of “Homo,” freed of the anatomical and temporal limits of the modern man. As always in the artist’s works, questions on the human condition are front and center in representation. “*Drawing, for me, boils down to creating a functioning symbolic space and to building a system in which we can place the world and its questions,*” explains Jérôme Zonder.



Baptiste #5, 2017-2018
Graphite on tracing paper
82 × 54 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels



Portrait de Garance #53, 2018
Graphite powder and charcoal powder on paper
77 × 57 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

From the Lascaux Caves to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, from *Alice in Wonderland* to Virginie Despentes, from *Terminator* to *The Walking Dead*, from a casualty of the Algerian War to the victims of the Nice terrorist attacks, the multiple sources of the artist’s inspiration, testimonies of his compulsive yet also wholesome relation to images of our time, are thus subjected to the different writing systems, which at times accumulate and at others cohabit and collide in a montage. The matrix of this complex tapestry of images, the *Fruits*, small, standardized drawings, constitute the artist’s primary nourishment and refer to an introductory step of drawing which allows us to “*cleanse ourselves of the fascination of images.*” These *Fruits*, gleaned from diverse iconographic repertoires, punctuate the exhibition’s first rooms, thus allowing the spectators—through the mimetic treatment of the source—to find their bearing in the established continuum. On a different scale, the portrait of Christopher Reeve at the start of the exhibition displays the same academic craftsmanship. The fallen superhero, condemned to his wheelchair, frozen in a position both tragic and grotesque in nature, is reminiscent of Warhol’s *Electric Chair*, an ambiguous allegory of death. Drawn on glossy tracing paper, this inaugural vision of a ghostly being reduced to reification instantly questions the “*becoming*” of the species, while paradoxically respecting the codes of representation inherited from the Renaissance.

Corresponding to a secondary state of representation, the fingerprint drawings and the portraits realized on cut and patched-together canvasses refer to an affirmation of the physicality of drawing—this runs counter to the dematerialization offered by screens and summoned here, in counterpoint, by the avalanche of images that accumulate to the point of saturation, under the arches of the gallery.

In the case of the first drawings, via a technique of fingerprinting graphite powder on paper, the artist introduces himself, as by infraction, into the source image with which he engages in hand-to-hand combat. Based on a low-resolution photograph found online of a victim of the Nice terrorist attacks, the portrait of the *Blessé (Wounded)* is emblematic in this respect. We barely recognize a child with a swollen face. This “disfiguration,” linked to the destructive impulse, which also stems from the Islamic State terrorists’ will to “make images,” is reinforced a type of alteration operated by the fingerprinting technique that blurs the faces, thus denouncing their perishable nature. By reworking a documentary image, which he has monumentalized by magnifying it, the artist has substituted the digital imprecision of the pixel, the incarnated blurriness of the human finger that reestablishes a carnal contact with the mutilated body—like family members attempting to save victims, to bring them back to life, through physical contact akin to an embrace.

We are also invited to an impossible embrace with the large, elegiac portrait of *L’Idole (The Idol)* Virginie Despentes, which offers itself frontally to the viewer, while remaining hopelessly elusive, as though buried in the graphic pulse that reveals it while hiding it. In the portraits of adolescents riveted to screens, the very material upon which the work is drawn—a stitched-up canvas—acts like flesh, like skin whose scars have poorly healed. The computer remains outside the frame: all that’s left of it in the image is the reflection of its bluish light on a face that is absent to itself, alienated. The passiveness of this surface is opposed to the underground agitation of cut-up lines that borrow the outlines of two historical paintings, dear to the artist: Poussin’s *Massacre of the Innocents* and Christian van Couwenbergh’s *Le Viol de l’esclave noire (Rape of the Black Slave)*, signals that the stigmata of a constantly updated collective violence continue to inhabit us without our knowledge. These different portraits crop up in the exhibition like so many individualities, accidentally emerging via a coagulation of a constant flow of events listed here and there in *Fruits*.

Above and beyond the emotional and memorial physicality of drawing, the last room in the gallery invites us into a third writing system, governed by the informal. At the end of their journey from shadow to light, visitors leave a space of representation to enter one of perception. They find themselves plunged in the contemplation of a monumental drawing, without an object, spattered with darkened fingerprints, each one of which paradoxically encloses the quintessence of the author’s genetic identity. A cellular drawing (*L’Autre #8 (The Other #8)*) hangs next to a black monochrome from which a line extends organically “from the artist,” who makes do with meticulously applying a protocol of molecular proliferation, vertiginous in its infinite possibilities.

Conceived of as a voyage through a universe in expansion, *Des Homo Sapiens* offers the visitor, who is assaulted by images, two main focal points: the eye and the hand that, between the lines, inform this visual magma. The exhibition is thus punctuated by representations of gazes—whether the digital gaze of HAL, the sentient computer from *2001: A Space Odyssey*; the fixed gaze of a reptile that incarnates the most archaic aspect of the act of seeing; or the lens of a paper camera, a sort of self-portrait of the artist, realized in a facsimile, a highlight of the exhibition.

A counterpart to this omnipresent scopophilia, the motif of the hand—that of the *Homo Faber*—is recurrently staged by the artist via representations of political acts (Mitterand and Kohl, holding hands in Verdun), of powerful gestures (a black athlete thrusting his fist in the air, following in the footsteps of Tommie Smith and John Carlos), of caresses, of meetings. At the heart of the exhibition, a multitude of anonymous silhouettes, hand-drawn with charcoal and graphite, seem to fuse together in a long undulation of shadows and light, that evoke this quote by Elias Canetti on crowds: “*It is only in a crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched.*”¹ Which brings up the question of the relation to ourselves and to others in a society where the “we” is not a given and the “I” escapes.

By bringing together the whole of the artist’s literary universes and his formal research over the past ten years, *Des Homo Sapiens* invites us to dive into the practice of Jérôme Zonder, in a way that has not happened since his exhibition at the Maison Rouge in 2015. The spectator who is familiar with his work will find *the Fruits, the Chairs Grises (Gray Flesh)*, ghosts of history and symptoms of our (bad) collective conscience, and the three characters who had formed the series *Jeux d’enfants (Childish Games)* from the outset: Garance, Baptiste and Pierre-François, who ceaselessly morph under our very eyes.

The two large portraits, *Portraits de Garance (Portraits of Garance)*, that welcome the visitors and accompany them out of the exhibition constitute, perhaps, the nodal point of this polygraphic work. As in sheet music, from repetitions to variations, the different elements that are the grid, the line, the fingerprint align themselves with solids and empty spaces, play in a choir or solo, allowing the winner of this perpetual game to emerge, limited by the all-powerful line, an authority that makes and unmakes—a subtle point of harmony upon which the artist, like an equilibrist, proceeds perilously.

¹ Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux (Macmillan), 1984 (first published in 1960), translated from the German by Carol Stewart.



Workshop view, Paris 2018

Photo credit : Marc Damage

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Bruxelles

Jérôme Zonder is born in 1974 in Paris where he lives and works.

Since he graduated from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2001, Jérôme Zonder has been one of the most famous artists of the young contemporary French scene. He is considered as one of the most important drawers of his generation.

2018 will be a particularly dense year for Jérôme Zonder.

The artist will benefit from a solo show at the Château de Chambord, *Devenir traces*, starting June 10th through September 30th. The exhibition will present over 130 works in the historical spaces of the castle, following a one-month in situ residency. This summer, Jérôme Zonder will also enjoy a solo show at the Centre d'Art Le Transpalette in Bourges.

Jérôme Zonder's œuvre has also been presented in notable personal exhibitions such as *The Dancing Room* at Tinguely Museum (Basel, Switzerland, 2017), *Fatum* at La Maison Rouge - Fondation Antoine de Galbert (Paris, France, 2015), and *Au Village* at the Lieu unique (Nantes, France, 2014).

This year, the artist will also take part in several group shows such as *Guernica* at the Musée Picasso in Paris, from March 27th to July 29th, and *Quel Amour !?* at the Musée d'Art Contemporain of Marseille, at the occasion of the MP 2018 artistic event, from May 9th to August 31st.

Jérôme Zonder was also invited by Laurent Le Bon and Pierre Rosenberg to participate in the show *Le Massacre des Innocents : Poussin, Picasso, Bacon* at the Musée Condé of Chantilly this past fall.

Thanks to his past group show *Prière de toucher* at the Tinguely Museum (Basel, Switzerland) in 2016 and his solo show *La Jeune Fille et la Mort* at the Drawing Center of Diepenheim (Netherlands) the same year, Jérôme Zonder has drawn a growing attention from the international art scene.

His work is present in important international collections such as The Istanbul Modern Museum, the FMAC Paris, the FRAC Picardie, the FRAC Auvergne, the Fondation Emerige, the Collection Antoine de Galbert, the Collection Florence and Daniel Guerlain and the Maison Particulière Myriam & Amaury de Solages.

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Jérôme Zonder

Des Homo Sapiens

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June 7th - July 21st

Bruxelles

Joris van de Moortel

April 18th - June 9th

Exposition d'été

June 21st - July 21st

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