

PRESENTING ONESELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Fabien Mérelle's new exhibition at Praz-Delavallade could be considered a portrayal of the artist in everyday life, a mise en scène of what happens within the confines of a place of leisure, a workplace, a place for creating or within a personal and intimate space. But what form does it take and what impression does it make on others? In the 1950s, a study by the American sociologist Erving Goffman, «The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life» addressed how we engage in behaviour akin to theatrical performances in our daily life, at the times when individuals come face to face and simultaneously try to control the impression they make, whilst attempting to gain information about the other. And it is this question that Fabien Mérelle has decided to tackle, this tension between an individual and the other, invariably portraying himself dressed in striped pyjama bottoms, a pantomime-like costume all the better to surreptitiously invade the public space in a civilised, bittersweet and ironic manner. He finally accedes, with the participation of his friends and relatives, to a theatrical dimension as he translates his fantastical and dreamlike scenes into ink and watercolour drawings. These drawings that describe in minute detail a world where present and past combine and the living, the dead and forgotten, humans and plants, whimsical characters and extraordinary animals are brought face to face like childhood dreams that have been repressed. Dreams that suddenly appear in his childhood drawings, which he has preciousely conserved and which forge a new dialogue with the little boy he was thirty years before. He takes books out of his archives that immediately find new virgin territories to conquer, adventures that are just a pencil stroke away thanks to his fertile imagination. One such example is this raft that is, to all extents and purposes, identical to a drawing (Radeau de Fortune, 2016) in which we see the artist on a raft, like Jonah having just escaped from the whale's stomach, but with the ears and tail of a donkey. As his character takes form on the white page, Fabien anchors his work in reality in order to continue his investigations of what gives life to the drawing and its source of inspiration. It is probably no coincidence that his character, in the original sense of the term, evokes the idea of a mask. Does not everyone, consciously or subconsciously; always play a role? And as we realise and accept this fact Fabien Mérelle's characters become believable and therein lies the sublime subtlety of the artist's approach.

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