

Press release

Hélène Delprat | “TO SLEEP TO DIE, NO MORE”

29 September - 17 November, 2018

Opening: Friday 28 September 2018, 6-9 pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce a solo exhibition with the French artist Hélène Delprat. This will be her first comprehensive exhibition with the gallery. Primarily known as a painter in the early days of her career, Delprat withdrew from public view in the mid-90s for nearly fifteen years to immerse herself in a series of “submerged practices” – namely writing, drawing, scenography film, radio, documentary and video. The breadth of Delprat’s creative practice attests to an omnivorous curiosity. She bends time-periods, genre, and the limits of taste to craft a conceptual and pictorial universe that is as immersive as it is idiosyncratic from a vast archive of literary, historical, film, and pop cultural references.

Processes of citation and translation abound in the work of Hélène Delprat. An indefatigable collector of both contemporary and historical imagery and texts, Delprat’s references serve as a spark or catalyst, yet the final result holds little respect for the original. She deforms, amplifies, exaggerates and multiplies her source material to create assemblages that are, as the artist says herself, “at times chaotic, a kind of montage and magnetization of forms and ideas that comes together in different ways.” Such assemblages, which can be destroyed at any time, thus imbue the images with another meaning and allow them to tell another story. Her exhibition with

carlier | gebauer includes new paintings, scenographic elements, as well as further works in various media. “TO SLEEP TO DIE, NO MORE” takes its inspiration from Laurence Olivier’s performance of the canonical “to be, or not to be” soliloquy from Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Perhaps one of the best known and most cited passages of English literature, Hamlet’s soliloquy parses existential, paradoxical questions about life and death, lies and madness, and the known and the unknown, which Delprat takes up in the exhibition. Hélène Delprat has often used Shakespearean staging directions or other elements in her work (such as the three witches in Macbeth chanting “Fair is foul and foul is fair”). In “TO SLEEP TO DIE, NO MORE,” Delprat spins a vast web of references that can include Disney’s big bad wolf, Betty Boop, war (the flag for the artist’s “autonomous territory,” tanks, swords, rifles, knives, wounds, chains), amorphous beasts with aggressive teeth and creatures of the artist’s own invention. Her large-scale paintings, executed in acrylic, pigment, and glitter, teem with these characters and more.

In *An Apple a Day Keeps the Doctor Away I* (2018), abstract blooms resembling the form of sea urchins or dandelion fluff appear amidst a wash of warm, earthy tones and sweeping strands of small circles that loop throughout the composition. Five shadowy, ambiguous characters—it is unclear whether they are ghosts or warriors, dumb figures or ornamental forms—encroach upon a hybrid figure at the center of the canvas. At once celestial and profane, the strange apparition that these warrior-ghosts encircle is similarly enigmatic—at once a perverse angel, serpent, demon, or long-eared ass. Delprat’s universe abounds with double meanings: innocent figures that may at first appear full of lightness and humor are sometimes, in fact, serious, tragic, or violent signs. Lest the relationships between the diverse constellation of references and media that the artist cultivates in her work seem to disorderly or self-referential, Delprat herself reminds us that the word *fatras*, which in modern French is translated negatively as a “mess” or a “jumble,” actually has its origins in the 12th and 13th century as a poetic form with composition rules that blended sense and nonsense.

Hélène Delprat (FR) lives and works in Paris. Recent solo exhibitions include Musée des Beaux-Arts de Caen (2018); la maison rouge, Paris (2017). Recent group exhibitions include Musée National Picasso, Paris (2018); Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, PSA, Shanghai (2018); and La Maison d'Art Bernard Anthonioz, Nogent (2018). Previous exhibitions and interventions include Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris; Jeu de Paume, Hors Pistes Festival at Centre Georges Pompidou, Collège de France. Her work is in the collections of Centre Pompidou, Fondation Cartier, Collection Antoine de Galbert and Pinault Collection.