

Press release

Vincent Gicquel | Brothers in Arms

24 November, 2018 – 19 January 2019

Opening: Friday, 23 November, 2018, 6–9 pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of new paintings by French artist Vincent Gicquel. This will be his first exhibition with the gallery. Gicquel constructs an autonomous, tragi-comic world in his works. He considers each painting that he makes to be a fragment of an internal monologue, describing them as “both x-rays of our world and cross sections of my own brain.” For Gicquel, painting and living occupy the same continuum. Both activities exist in the same relationship to the world – existence, like painting, has no goal.¹ The only goal is to live.

In *Brothers in Arms*, Gicquel presents a series of new oil paintings in which he further develops the androgynous, humanoid figures that have populated his canvases in recent years. While earlier works captured these figures engrossed in banal, pointless routines or oddly dispassionate sexual configurations within candy-colored landscapes, Gicquel’s newest works primarily present these characters in isolation. *Arc* depicts a solitary figure with his shoulders slightly slouching forwards. He clutches an ambiguous rainbow form over his genitals, which is bound to his body by a loincloth of sorts. It’s unclear whether this form is part of his body or something he has stolen and is therefore trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to conceal from view. He looks slightly stunned—as if overcome by his own power or caught red-handed. *Mardi-Gras* depicts two figures standing before a candy-striped wall. The larger figure stands with his hand placed on the head of the smaller figure who stands by his side, yet despite this paternalistic and very human gesture there is nonetheless a blurring that occurs between the young and the old, the animal and the human. Despite his stature, the taller figure has the face of a child and the gently sloping ears of a baby lamb. Conversely, his shorter companion possesses a strange bird-like quality and his countenance has the assured gaze of an old man.

The expression *brothers in arms* is used to designate people who have served together in some sort of conflict, most typically war. The term denotes an extreme closeness, a shared sense of time and space that shapes the way one views the world. It’s difficult at first to ascertain what kind of intimate bond might link Gicquel’s figures beyond a shared sense of solitude – even when they are together. In a series of small-format works, each figure is painted alone and depicted against a background of the same color palette that threatens to subsume them. Painted from the shoulders up, their limbs are not visible and they have little space to operate within. This formal choice seems to deprive the characters of their capacity to *act* – yet they nonetheless seem to respond and *feel*. Viewed together, the portraits form a continuum of suspended states of emotion: bemusement, horror, fear, surprise, sadness, and self-satisfaction. Gicquel has claimed in interviews that his characters are egotistical and out for themselves—and that they have no links to the world, and even less to the people, that surround them. Yet in meeting our gaze, these strange creatures bridge the gap between painting and life, as if to claim the viewer as their “brother in arms”—another witness to the paradoxical uncertainty of the human condition.

Vincent Gicquel (b.1974 in Normandy) lives and works in Bordeaux. He has recently exhibited at La Criée centre d’art contemporain, Rennes and the presentation of the Pinault collection at Couvent des Jacobins, Rennes.

¹ Pedro Morais, “Vincent Gicquel,” p.14.