

It was 1998 when the Californian punk rock band The Offspring released their song “The Kids Aren’t Alright”, which lyrics go like this: “*When we were young the future was so bright*” (...) “*Chances thrown / Nothing’s free / Longing for what used to be / Still it’s hard / Hard to see / Fragile lives, shattered dreams*”. How to better describe the so-called “Millennial” generation?

Those who, born from the 1980s until the end of the 1990s, are now young adults: a generation that is facing unprecedented global economic and climate crisis, struggling with rising mental health issues and social exhaustion due to the final twirl of capitalism. “It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism”, wrote philosopher Slavoj Žižek, and in fact the last 30 years have been a progressive, spiral loop erasing future’s hopes and dreams. The end of the iron curtain and the spread of neo-liberal market in central-eastern countries didn’t show a different generational scenario in non-Western narratives: the current consequences appear to be the same. We aren’t alright. We were promised everything, we grew delusional and yet we are accused to be greedy when fighting for our survival, while it has been years that we are screaming that something is going really wrong here. But nobody listened – let the kids play, they’ll stop, eventually. *The Kids Aren’t Alright* is a Millennial exhibition, although for “Millennial” is intended not only the year of birth, but a shared feeling of instability, grief for our dead futures, and repressed anger that finds comfort in altered states of mind. Nine artists, four different countries,

Malgorzata Mirga-Tas

Born in Zakopane in 1978, lives and works in Czarna Góra. Graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow; diploma in the Sculpture Studio of Prof. Józef Sekowski (2004). Scholarship holder of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage (2018) and the International Visitor Leadership Program (USA, 2015). Awarded at the 42nd Biennial of Painting, Bielska Jesień 2015, and finalist of the 43rd edition of the competition (2017). Organizer and curator of the „Romani Art” project and the annual International Event of Roma Art in Czarna Góra Jaw Dikh! (Come and see!). Her work was recently featured in the third edition of the Art Encounters Biennial in Timisoara, Romania, and it will be included in the 2020 Berlin Biennale.

<https://www.romarchive.eu/malgorzata-mirga-tas/>

Yoan Mudry

Born in Lausanne in 1990, lives and works in Geneva. Yoan Mudry is a multi-disciplinary artist. He studied at HEAD in Geneva where he graduated with a MFA in 2014. His work focuses on an attempt to understand the mechanisms of the flux of images, narrations and information that are surrounding our world. He was shortlisted in the Swiss Art Awards, Basel in 2019, and awarded with a Cahier d’Artistes 2019. He won the Kiefer Hablitzel Preis, Basel, in 2016. Since 2013 his work has been shown in group and solo exhibition in Switzerland and abroad. www.yoanmudry.com

Marta Ravasi

Born in Merate in 1987, lives and works in Locarno. She owns a BA in painting from Accademia di Belle Arti, Brera, and a MA in Fine Arts, University of the Arts London - Wimbledon College of Arts, London. Marta Ravasi’s paintings were shown in group exhibition in Italy, Switzerland, and the UK. She engages with painting as a challenge with herself, imposing self-established limitations such as a restraint palette of colours and everyday subjects. www.martaravasi.com

Luca Rossi Dossi

Born in Lugano in 1988, lives and works in Basel. He graduated in 2019 from Haute Ecole d’Art et Design, Geneva. Winner of the Prize Jungkunst Winterthur in 2018, since 2016 he has been participating in group and solo show in Switzerland and around Europe. Painter with an unusual background that includes a half-degree in Hindi, Luca Rossi Dossi creates in-between objects while predilecting the use of misshapen canvases. For any inquiries: luca.alex.rossi.dossi@gmail.com

Art historian, Elisa Rusca (1986) is a curator and writer. www.elisarusca.com

one medium: painting.

Silent screams are depicted in the works of Naoki Fuku, who produces large canvases through live painting actions, combining Gutai practices with the western genre of portrait; Mathis Gasser’s science-fiction capriccios, on the other hand, disrupt the status of “low” pop-culture and “high” cultural production.

Séverine Heizmann adopts a naïve style, which mixes musical rhythms and personal mythologies, while Maja Kitajewska seduces us with glittering glass beads compositions of weird submarine landscapes and a disturbing self-portrait, going beyond kitsch and fabric art.

Mikolaj Malek’s large oil paintings take us into a theatrical imagery where nightmares and realities mix; Malgorzata Mirga-Tas uses patchworks of textiles to depict the everyday life of her rom community in southern Poland, adopting a documentary cut to genre painting. Yoan Mudry’s Functional Stupidity series (2018-ongoing) is a game of cut-up, repetition and mimicry, while Marta Ravasi’s thick layered works explore the change in scale of her everyday subjects; finally, Luca Rossi Dossi refers to punk nihilism in order to create misshaped canvases, unfinished and awaiting.

As the scream of a generation desperately looking for a cure to the sickness of this system, the exhibition collects works from these nine new positions in painting. Radically different from each other, the nine artists address, however, similar questions about the world we are living in, depicting it as a confused melting-pot of “fragile lives and shattered dreams”.

Naoki Fuku

Born in Tokyo in 1978, lives and works in Basel. Working across mediums, the works of Naoki Fuku appeal to the viewers’ most intimate self in the middle of today’s exhausting life. His work has been exhibited at galleries, museums and alternative venues in Japan, Switzerland, Germany, the UK, France, Austria, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, Italy, USA, Belgium, Brazil, the Netherlands and Russia. www.naokifuku.com

Mathis Gasser

Born in Zurich in 1984, lives and works in London. Mathis Gasser graduated from Haute Ecole d’Art et de Design, Geneva and the Royal College of Art, London. Trained painter, he received the Prix Strawinsky in 2010, and was shortlisted in the Swiss Art Awards 2019. Resident at the Swiss Institute, Rome in 2017, since 2007 his work has been shown in group and solo shows in Europe, the United States and Japan. Mathis Gasser’s realistic paintings often depict landscapes and engines from speculative fiction. www.mathisgasser.com

Séverine Heizmann

Born in Geneva in 1994 where she currently lives and works, Séverine Heizmann works with painting and music. She graduated at the Haut Ecole d’Art et de Design, Geneva, in 2018. She received the Prix Strawinsky in 2018, and was shortlisted in the Swiss Art Awards 2019. She owns the label Emotronic Photosynthesis, and released her first EP and tape in 2019. For any inquiries: severine.heizmann@gmail.com

Maja Kitajewska

Born in Warsaw in 1986, where she currently lives and works. Maja Kitajewska graduated the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw from the Faculty of Painting in 2011. That same year she participated in the exhibition of the Best Diplomas of the Academy of Fine Arts, and she became a laureate of the SIEMENS artistic award and the “ENTRY” initiative prize. Her work has been shown in group and solo exhibition in Poland, Germany, Switzerland and Peru, and it’s part of private and public collection in Poland and Germany. <http://majakitajewska.blogspot.com/>

Mikolaj Malek

Born in Brwinow in 1983, lives and works in Warsaw. Mikolaj Malek is painter, draughtsman, installation artist, set designer. He studied painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. He defended his doctoral dissertation in the studio of Prof. Grzegorz Sztwiertnia in 2017. Since 2018, together with Anna Maria Karczmarska, he has been working in a stage design collective. He participated in solo and group exhibitions in Poland, Germany and Norway.

The Kids Aren't Alright – new positions in painting

Naoki Fuku, Mathis Gasser, Séverine Heizmann, Maja Kitajewska, Mikolaj Malek, Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, Yoan Mudry, Marta Ravasi, Luca Rossi Dossi

curated by Elisa Rusca
21.02 – 28.03.2020, la rada, Locarno (CH)

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Mathis Gasser: courtesy of Weiss Falk Gallery, Basel
Maja Kitajewska, Mikolaj Malek, Malgorzata Mirga-Tas: courtesy of Galeria Szydlowski, Warsaw
Yoan Mudry: courtesy of Union Pacific, London; Nicolas Krupp, Basel

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Splashes of black ink on large, white canvases depict gigantic, bold human heads: their mouths are open or distorted in silent screams, their eyes are closed, or portraying a febrile stare. The strokes of the bamboo stick, the dripping, the marks on the surface suggest us that the image that we are observing was created in a dynamic process, and part of that movement is still there, as reverberating from the canvas. The head is there, floating. Cut out, yet hyper conscious. In **NAOKI FUKU**'s heads depicted in his series *Studies of Human Mind* (2015-on-going) there is a latent violence, loneliness, alienation, climax. They are debris of an explosion.

Fuku's artistic production is indeed the alchemic combustion between different compounds that he manages to select and combine according to their intensity, resulting in portraits of obsessively precise, meandric traits, or in expressionistic self-portraits that he paints while putting the canvas on the floor. The symmetries are inverted: Fuku doesn't reach for a confrontational relation to the object he is creating. He rather dives into the surface, liquefying himself in the black ink and transferring himself in the painting. Despite being highly expressive, the gesture is always controlled, revealing a skilled ability in the technique of drawing. When live painting, Fuku is accompanied by a musician. The artist then follows the improvised music, let himself be guided by it, while simultaneously letting his deepest side emerge and fuse with the ink on the paper under him. It is then impossible not to think of the works of the Gutai Group, a major post-war avant-garde collective founded in Osaka in 1954 by the painter Jiro Yoshihara. Gutai artists aimed to integrate performative gestures, spontaneous and immediate, in their practices, in order to break through traditional visual codes. Gutai wanted the body of the artist to concretise the meaning of art production – the name itself "gutai" was a combination of the characters "gu", which may be translated with "tool", and "tai", "body". Although not openly referring to Gutai, Naoki Fuku merges the limits of his body with the painting, and explores the tension between the container and the contained, which may be his mind and his body, but also his body and the societal structure. His gigantic heads – a theme that is absent in the Japanese tradition – make us also think of the work of Georg Baselitz and of the western expressionist movements. Fuku's painting is indeed expressionistic, re-appropriating and merging together eastern and western pictorial traditions and materials.

Naoki Fuku reaches us with his powerful images, beautiful and terrifying as a dark vortex on a river, dragging us in our deepest corners. The heads we are looking at are our mirrors, exposing the suffering, the rage, the hedonistic pleasure, and the silent screams of our oppressed body in late-capitalistic, techno-dependant, contemporary societies.

THE KIDS AREN'T ALRIGHT

Monochrome, unfinished, of exaggerated dimensions or round, mysterious, perforated: **LUCA ROSSI DOSSI**'s canvases are formal statements going against the illusion of linearity in the history of the medium and in the history of art. Rossi Dossi claims American punk nihilism movement from the 1980s as a reference in his work, and likes to play with misshaped canvases, whose unusual, distorted stretchers make them abstract objects hanging on the walls.

The artist doesn't hide his personal frustration in regards of feelings of missed possibilities among the youngest generation of painters. His work embodies the nostalgic seduction of a lost future. Dry and flat, the paintings reflect the viewers frustration when looking at them. We notice that something is missing, such as physical pieces of the canvas; however, we inevitably cannot figure out clearly what is it, nor why. This feeling mirrors Rossi Dossi position facing his contemporary condition as an artist looking at the great master of the past, and his lucid awareness of finding himself not aligned with the world around him. The frustration is then related to questions that Rossi Dossi poses about his own purpose as a young artist and his related value on the international markets.

Baby Blue Idiot (2020) and *American Mold* (2020) directly refer to two pieces of Steven Parrino, *Blue Baby Suicide* (1995) and *Aluminum Bitch* (1990). *Baby Blue Idiot* (2020) takes the word "idiot" from Parrino's piece *Blue Baby Suicide*, in which "idiot" is written twice on the right side of the canvas. This work also presents a particular series of round perforations, which Rossi Dossi takes as a formal base for his own piece. Parrino's *Aluminum Bitch* is a huge, horizontal piece that Rossi Dossi appropriates, reduces in size and distorts even more: his *American Mold* becomes a more sinuous, abstract structure. The evident game with Parrino's title is enriched with a self-mocking element: the "American Mold", which is Parrino's piece, casts its shadow on Rossi Dossi's, and, simultaneously, Rossi Dossi's piece is a cast, an object made in a mould, of Parrino's. This evidently not only refers to this specific work, but can be used as an ontological strategy in Rossi Dossi's whole practice.

Parrino used the term "misshaped" in opposition to the shaped canvases of the sixties, minimal, controlled, flat, although coming in forms that were going beyond the classic rectangular format. Similarly, Rossi Dossi appropriates Parrino's concept of misshaped, but he doesn't follow to the punk spirit of the American painter. Pushed more to dig in bourgeois ennui, Rossi Dossi's misshaped canvases embody misspoken promises, and lethargic disappointment. Striving to find his place on the contemporary scene, Rossi Dossi doesn't hide the fact that he is aware of the game, but he seems to be not interested in playing it – at least, not if not on his own terms.

"Science Fiction" wrote Brooks Landon "is the only popular genre to have a cultural impact". While one might or might not agree with this sentence, it is true that science fiction is a specific genre whose topics and imaginary allow a large spectrum for dialogue beyond the boundaries of pop culture per se. This flexibility of the genre makes sci-fi a clever strategy to put in perspective and discuss themes that are relevant for the present moment, more than in a distant, imaginary future.

MATHIS GASSER's work is a bright example of the permeability of sci-fi in contemporary visual art in general, and in painting in particular. His realistic, large format canvases depict futuristic space ships, alien planets' landscapes, ultra-technological cities. These worlds, in which the human figure is always absent, present to us contemporary *capriccios*. In fact, the "capriccio" was a very popular, specific genre in Europe in the mid-17th century. Originated in Italy, a typical "capriccio" would show fantasy scenarios of architectural settings (typically ruins from ancient roman sites), in which would be juxtaposed in the same frame actual archaeological sites being not geographically close or historically related. Gasser presents us an universe made of mechanical parts, glass and steel buildings, celestial bodies, which seems frozen in silence and combined in capriccio paintings that play with the cinematographic cuts of science-fiction movies' photography, instead of roman ruins.

Cut-up collages of multiple engines, but also technical drawings, as well as catalogues of categories' typology are other visual strategies that the artist employs to realise works such as *Battlestar Galactica Spaceships* (2019) and *Shadow Ship* (2019), which focus on speculative flying machines. On a neutral background, which might be black or white, the artist presents these fictive vessels in a detailed, precise way, as they were part of our everyday experience, such as boats and cars. The familiarity with those specific space ships usually relies to a narrow group of fans of those related pop-sources, such as the TV-series *Babylon 5* (1994-1999) and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2008).

Gasser takes out these objects from their fan-niche, and presents them as they were of common knowledge. Their cultural status appears to change, since it is altered by the medium in which their image is reproduced: from sketches and drawings in movies' storyboard or fan comics works, they become big, oil on canvas paintings: the hierarchies between pop-culture and educated cultural production are then inverted. Therefore, one doesn't have to be a sci-fi fan to enjoy the peculiarity of Mathis Gasser's practice: by selecting elements from different sources, the artist manages to integrate them in a wider discussion about art categories and pictorial genres.



Marta Ravasi, *Spilla*, 2019, oil on canvas, 40 x 31 cm, courtesy of the Artist

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Working with large and small formats, **MARTA RAVASI's** style is a refined, aristocratic research aiming to transform unappealing colours desirable, and unoriginal objects peculiar. In her paintings the palette is restraint to cold, monochrome tones of purple, grey, blue, mud: the artist likes to push herself to work with strict conditions, in order to go beyond her own limits. Even when Ravasi uses warmer tones, such as orange, or brown, the composition and the frame make her work distant, dissected, hard, due to her use of the white colour, which gives to each painting a flat, suspended light coming from their inside. Her technique of flat surfaces hides multiple layers of paint coming one after the other on the canvas, producing shadows and visual, almost imperceptible echoes.

Ravasi takes her subjects out of everyday life, creating still lives that might remind us of the Italian pictorial production of Giorgio Morandi (1890 - 1964) and Filippo De Pisis (1896 - 1956). From Morandi we see the tonal subtlety in depicting common objects using a monochromatic scale of colours; however, Ravasi refuses to stick to a plain, horizontal view, and likes to experiment with multiple possibilities of depicting the still lives, which include zooming into a detail and making it taking over the whole canvas, as well as assuming a point of view from above. This unusual framing is the formal element relating to De Pisis' painting, who also had a particular attention for food and living creatures in still lives. *Falena bianca* (2020) ("White Moth") finds a reference in a small work of De Pisis. Ravasi takes the small detail of a moth - but also, more generally, of a butterfly - and uses it to construct a composition of diagonal, powerful lines, almost reducing it to its graphic structure which also reminds to the geometric patterns of stained glass in Art Nouveau. *Agrumi ticinesi* (2019) ("Citrus from Ticino"), on the other hand, is more related to Morandi's work. This smaller piece depicts a small group of citrus is posed in a bowl on a table, the tones are muddy, tending to grey. The layers of colours appear to be thick on the surface; the round shapes of the fruits is given by the brush's marks carefully applied on the subjacent layers, while on the upper part of the canvas we can see more free, horizontal strokes, defining the space of the scene. This difference of hand in working with the paint on the surface creates a contrast with the defined traits that the artist uses for depicting the fruits. *Spilla* (2019) ("Brooch") is another small format, in which we can see the artist ability to zoom in a tiny object and reproducing it, denoting again a particular sensibility to the graphic structures of her subjects.

The more we look at Marta Ravasi poetic paintings, the more we discover in them shades and volume; from Ravasi's work, elegant and subtle, permeates a strange magnetism which hypnotizes us, capturing us as rainbow's reflection unexpectedly glowing from a dark surface.



Mathis Gasser, *Battlestar Galactica Spaceships*, 2019, oil on canvas, 145 x 100 x 4 cm, courtesy Weiss Falk and the Artist, Photo: Flavio Karrer

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Luca Rossi Dossi, *Tropica*, 2018, acrylic and metal paint on shaped canvas, 100,5 x 60,5 cm, Photo: ©L.Olivet

SEVERINE HEIZMANN adopts a naïve style, which mixes musical rhythms and personal mythologies that she condenses in oil on canvas constellations. Her artistic research explores the tension of desire dancing between musical performative actions and painting.

In fact, along with her painting practice, Heizmann carries on a musical exploration, performing since 2015 with her group Pullman Rose, a duo with her brother. Her vocal and rhythmical experimentations pop of a progressive-dub taste find an echo in her pictorial productions. There is a weird impulsivity in her work, in which we found her interest in natural cycles, in alternances of warmth and cold and of darkness and light. Everything is about complementarity, and complementarity shows also what is missing, what remains in-between, she seems to say in her paintings of multiple, different sizes, which often comes in pairs. The artist reclaim the use of an infantile traits when realising her subjects, arranging her composition according to spontaneous associations, such as a free jazz improvisation.

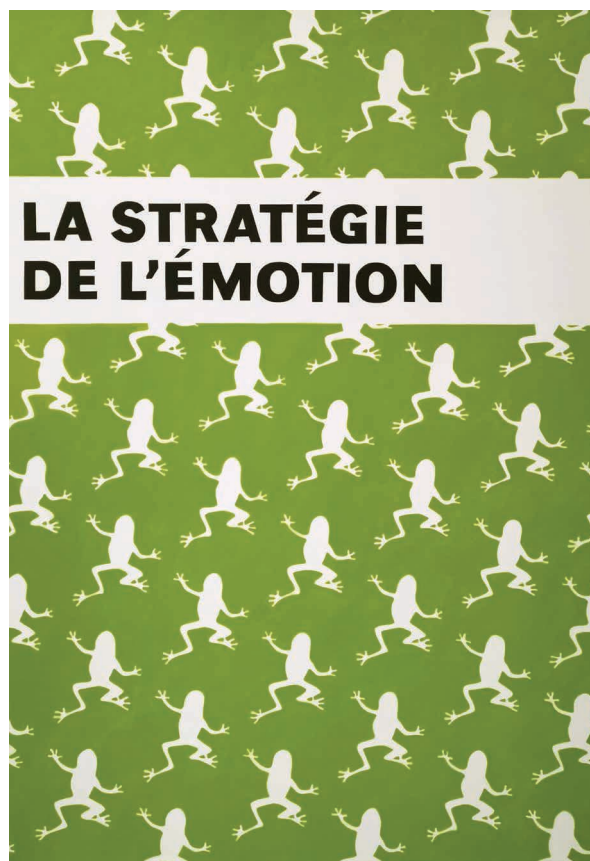
Sunday morning; feeling like scrambled eggs; the sun is shining (2020) is an example of the visual freestyle that Heizmann reaches to achieve. Overlayered coats of colourful painting are combined on the surface irradiating from the centre of the canvas, such as a particular energy which inexorably moves towards the limit of its support. Round, yellow entities – which recall the adjustments of our vision when we try to focus on distant lights – bubbles around, in contrast to the spiral rays – or, as the title suggests us, “scrambled” rays. The fresh vibe of this light energy clashes against the heavy matter and colours of *Athena* (2020), a smaller format of red, brown and black tones. What are we looking at? If in *Sunday morning; feeling like scrambled eggs; the sun is shining* the lines were going from the centre to the sides in diagonal and centrifuge lines, in *Athena* everything goes swallowed in, as the energy is captured in a centripetal movement ending beyond the events’ horizon, such as in black holes. Is this a mouth? A vagina dentata? The interior of monstrous intestines?

There is a lot of irony and lightness in Heizmann’s work, but also a playful position of mockery in regards of stereotypes of young women artists, who often feel the pressure of the necessity of doing “political” art for being taken seriously in the art world. Séverine Heizmann refuses to force herself to be labelled as a “woman artist”, and yet chose a childish, delicate-looking style to challenge this clichés, assuming and reclaiming her freedom and uniqueness.



Naoki Fuku, *Tsumi to Batsu* („Crime and Punishment“), 2017, ink and acrylic on canvas, 210 x 160 cm, courtesy of the Artist and SinArts

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Yoan Mudry, *La*, 2019, acrylic and oil on canvas, 160 x 110 cm, courtesy of the Artist and Union Pacific

The work of **MAJA KITAJWESKA** certainly doesn't pass unnoticed. Shiny, baroque, queer, Kitajewska's canvases are first painted and then enriched with pearls, glass beads and sequins that the artist sew by hand on the surface. The results is a sparkling, vibrating object of multiple tones, half painting and half tapestry, which format can vary from small to medium-large, and that sometimes, folded together, can become a sculpture.

However, one will be mistaken in thinking that her work relies only on her original technique. In fact, Kitajewska is fascinated by weird creatures, unusual news stories, and peculiar images that she usually finds in her online everyday life; she also likes to play with classic iconology and themes from European art history, re-appropriating them and mixing them together with her digital native background. Examples of this are her series *Shake the Disease* (2018-2019) and *Fragile* (2018). In the first one, Kitajewska takes inspiration from the Dutch Old Masters and manages to subvert the genre by painting flowery still lifes that she parasitizes with single hand-made insects of glass beads. Flies, worms, ants, moths that usually are secondary, tiny details, in Kitajewska's world become the predominant subjects: a glittering, moving mass of creatures eating the surface. The paintings become then irreverent vanitas in which the objects of repulsion – the insects – carry in them an invincible seductive power. The sensuality of the medium is exacerbated in *Fragile*, where erotic miniatures from French rococo painters such as François Boucher or Jean-Honoré Fragonard are translated in small format canvases where the glass beads become colourful pixels composing the image, in which the artist likes to exaggerate the nudity and sexual allusions. Although she doesn't work only figuratively (like in *Flags* (2016-2017), a medium-large golden monochromes series of personal heraldry, or in *Echo Rhapsody* (2012), six silver round monochromes of different sizes), *Arms around you* (2019) is a rather singular specimen in the artist world, since it depicts an abstract landscape of three-dimensional glass beads alternate to painted flat colours. The composition reminds us of submarine coral reef, as the pearls and the sequins are emerging from the surface as delicate, colourful tentacles or unusual, alien vegetation.

Her newest production, *Selfportrait* (2020), opens a new research on the western tradition of the pictorial portrait. The traits of the face, realised with the same technique of glass beads sewed together, are unrecognisable; the painting seems to move according to the light in the room, and push the viewers to reflect on questions about subjectivity, the look of the other and the impossibility to define oneself.

Queen of the weird and wizard of the glass, Maja Kitajewska reclaims a stereotyped idea of kitsch in painting, creating a unique, personal universe where nothing is simply the way it seems.



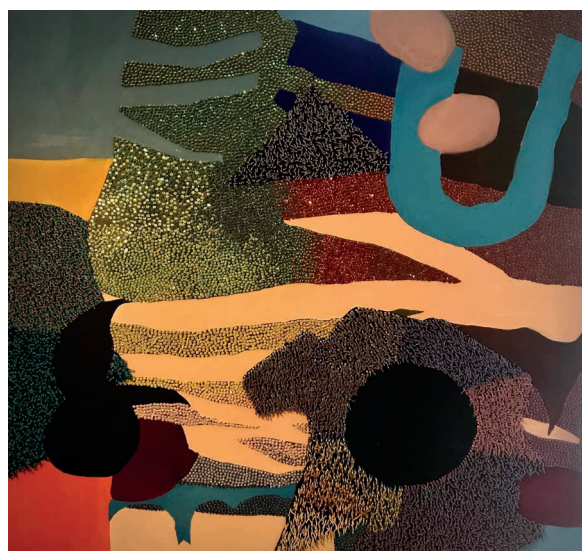
Malgorzata Mirga-Tas, *Chavo he Dad*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, textiles, mixed media, 100 x 150 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and Galeria Szydłowski

Old women sitting in front of their houses, smoking, while a cat pass by. Men playing cards, drinking tea. Children playing in yards with chicken and dogs. Clothes hanging to dry in the sun, women laughing. **MALGORZATA MIRGA-TAS** depicts everyday scenes of her family and friends, of her community: the Roma settlement of Czarna Góra, a village in the southern Poland.

Taking cardboards and wooden plates, Mirga-Tas creates paintings and objects with used fabrics and traditional textiles taken from people that she knows, which she combines over painted layers, and enriches drawings on them. Her colourful patchworks have been linked to the concept of "femmage", the feminist collage made with materials and depicting scenes of the women's life and rituals, although Mirga-Tas doesn't focus only on the feminine sphere. Her scenes are more issued from the visual tradition of the genre painting, which appear in multiple art traditions towards centuries and geographical areas. Genre paintings picture ordinary people engaged in common activities such as markets and shops exchanges, food preparation, social gatherings, seasonal agrarian labours. A characteristic of genre painting is its decorative, illustrative aspect, which doesn't have a moral or documentary goal. It is a pure tale of life, the visual narrative of certain community. In Mirga-Tas work, these aspects are exacerbated through her use of fabrics coming from her surroundings in the process of making the image. She frames her scenes with a photographic cut that catches the characters in the middle of an action, and often shows someone looking directly "on camera". This strategy disrupts the distant eye of the painter in genre paintings: it creates an immediate connection between the viewers and the subjects in the scene. This proximity is also stressed by the use of a linear perspective that surrenders to a canvas' division in areas of flat inserts of oil painting and colourful textiles.

In *Chavo he Dad* (2016) ("Son and Father") three men are sitting at a table, drinking coffee, playing cards. One, wearing a short with ROM written on the chest, is lighting a cigarette to another, while the third one, who's wearing a red t-shirt with a Star Wars character on it, is looking directly at us. Behind them, two women are talking together. The textiles on the background and on the right part of the composition divide the scene formally in a grid of vertical and horizontal lines. The men are placed diagonally within this grid, adding dynamism to the composition, and the cards are glued directly on the surface, increasing the illusion of depths and the proximity with the viewers.

Malgorzata Mirga-Tas creates bridges between worlds and communities, softly, but directly, by revindicating a life that exists between contrasts, a universe that might seem distant, but which is palpitant and alive in the urge of manifesting and affirming itself.

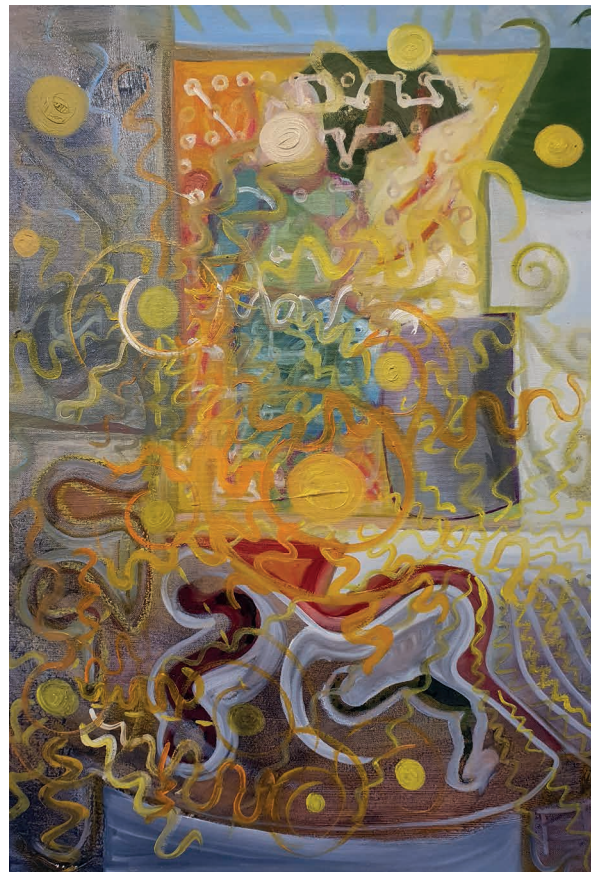


Maja Kitajewska, *Arms around you*, 2019, mixed media with sequins and glass beads, 120 x 120 cm, courtesy of the Artist and Galeria Szydłowski

Everything is blatantly clear and, simultaneously, nothing is in **YOAN MUDRY**'s work. Is he making fun of us? Maybe. But in a very serious way. Sorry, I am joking. Am I?

Conceptual artist of the 21st century, Mudry rebels against categories, revolts against the (almost) inevitable process of giving labels, of connecting with grouped references. This is probably why he refuses to stick to one medium, and likes to interchange painting, installation, performance, audio pieces, video, sculpture. "The medium is the message", as Marshall McLuhan said, implying that the characteristics of the medium delivering the content affect the receiver as, if not more, the content delivered. Indeed, Mudry adapts the medium to the message he wants to deliver. The accumulation of visual appropriations, a pop-post-digital-fluxus, and the absurdity of our images-overloaded condition appear to be the semio-capitalistic mess from where Mudry's creativity springs, using mimicry and loops to create short-circuits of repetitional pastiches. In that respect, his ongoing series *Functional Stupidity* (2018-present) is a cruel dissection of that same sampling culture to which the artist is referring to. Yes because one would be mistaken in looking for genuine mockery or healthy laugh, in Mudry's work. It is more stone cold sarcasm, a bitter smile. In his universe nothing is spontaneous, and the irreverence that we perceive is not carried out of passion, out of boiling blood; it is rather a calculated, self-complacent cruelty. Each painting of this series is a book's cover replicated and expanded in scale, each of these being part of Mudry's world of references, whose titles are shortened, again sampled, lost in a recombinatory action of voluntary confusion. However, to an attentive eye, the subjacent grid emerges, revealing a universe that interrogates perception, manipulation and ethics. *Être* (2019) is indeed the cover of the 2007 essay "Être Bête" by Jocelyne Porcher and Vinciane Despret on human subjectivity, questioning anthropocentrism and the difference between nature and culture; *La* (2019) is the book by sociologist Anne-Cécile Robert "La stratégie de l'émotion", on general loss of rational abilities in the rise of emotional manipulation of the masses; the Polish artists' collective Slavs & Tatars' monograph "Mouth to Mouth" is the behind the work titled *Slavs* (2019); while *Skandinavisk* (2019) refers to 1964 "Ting of Polis" by Danish painter Asger Jorn, one of the founder of the international situationism movement.

In fact, in front of Yoan Mudry's work we have to embrace a situationist attitude, as we were Pegman, the yellow little man of Google maps randomly dropped somewhere around the globe by an involuntary movement of the mousepad. Mudry reminds us that we are facing only bits of the whole picture, and we won't be able to find truth or virtue, nor transcendental enlighten. What should we do, then? Admitting that we are an army of zombies ants, and now please smile for the camera.



Séverine Heizmann, *Sunday morning; feeling like scrambled eggs; the sun is shining*, 2020, oil on canvas, 70 x 49 cm, courtesy of the Artist

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MIKOLAJ MALEK has an eclectic artistic practice, which encompasses drawing, painting, stage design, sculpture, music. Malek feels a deep connection with the theatre, and respectively, the world of the theatre throw its shadows in the artist's imaginary. Masks, costumes and mannequins are, in fact, linked to this visual universe, which historically has a strong bond with the Polish avant-garde tradition, in particular with the figure and the work of Tadeusz Kantor (1915-1990). Malek studied in the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, the same place where, decades before, Kantor served as a professor and performed his experimental theatre pieces; without openly referring to Kantor, the young artist carries in his productions the signs of a deep incorporation of Kantor's visual legacy.

His style is figurative, although the scenes he depicts remain somehow abstract. There is a surreal, unfinished halo in his drawings; magisterially playing with the lightning, in his scenes the characters move in an infinite space. Like in dreams, absurd, nightmarish figures appear, depicted in motions induced by tiny details, such as the vapor coming out of ajar mouths, or a tensed leg's muscle. In his oil paintings, the composition suggests a latent tension, as we were in the middle of a frozen action, as something might happen at any second. The large format of his canvas allows him to realise giant figures that stare at us like silent, mysterious sphynxes. We are suddenly swallowed in the scene as if the limits between our reality and the scene in front of us would disappear. Our spatial references are wiped away, and our sense of scale is completely disoriented, as we see in *The Head* (2019): the small detail of an architectural façade is exaggerated and detached from its support, becoming a floating, ghostly head, or in *The Eye* (2019), a bottom view of a majestic sundial that occupies the whole frame. In *The Mask and the Soldier* (2019) we find ourselves facing a giant mask that occupy the left part of the canvas, and a human figure depicted from the side is portending the bust toward it. It might be a soldier, it might be a jester. The tones of yellowish white, black, blue and light blue dominate the composition, which is clearly divided in two: a bright side, the left part – where the mask is – and a dark side, the right one, which embraces the soldier. The theatrical contrast is done by the light treatment on the mask, which looks as it has a spotlight pointing to its side close to the centre of the scene, and which produces a sense of depths. The reminiscent light reflecting on the soldier is enough to makes us notice that he is also wearing a mask.

Mikolaj Malek's work plays games of perception with our mind, capturing us in a labyrinth of hidden, boiling forces, recalling Bruno Schulz's drawings and Gustave Moreau's paintings; a universe of mirrors inside mirrors where, from a very long distance, we believe to hear a joker giggling.



Mikolaj Malek, *The Mask and the Soldier*, 2019, oil on canvas, 160 x 140 cm, courtesy of the Artist and Galeria Szydłowski

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