

PRESS RELEASE

La Salle de bains is pleased to welcome **Sophie Nys** for a three-screen exhibition that will take place between 4 February and 3 July, 2021 at La Salle de bains (Lyon).

Room 1 : opening Thursday, 4 February, 2021

Exhibition from 4 to 13 March, 2021 at La Salle de bains, Lyon

Room 2 : opening Saturday, 20 March, 2021

Exhibition from 20 March to 29 May, 2021 at La Salle de bains, Lyon

Room 3 : opening Thursday, 10 June, 2021

Exhibition from 10 June to 3 July, 2021 at La Salle de bains, Lyon

Biographies:

Sophie Nys (1974), lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.

Her recent solo shows include *Family Nexus* at KIOSK, Ghent, Belgium (2019); *Etui of the private individual* at Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels, Belgium (2019); *Not a shoe* at Guimaraes, Vienna, Austria (2018); *Sophie Nys* at Archiv, Zurich, Switzerland (2015); *Ein Tisch ohne Brot ist ein Brett*, CRAC Alsace, Altkirch, France (2015); and *Parque do Flamengo* at La Loge, Brussels, Belgium (2012).

The artist is represented by Galerie Greta Meert, Brussels, Belgium.

<https://galeriegretameert.com/artists/sophie-nys/>

<http://emmanuelherve.com/en/artistes/oeuvres/4/sophie-nys>

Gregory Polony (1984), lives and works in Zurich, Switzerland.

His latest solo show is *A personal account of a self of some kind* at Kantine, Brussels, Belgium (2019).

Michael Van den Abeele (1974), lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.

His most recent solo shows include *Important Fan* at Galerie Gaudel de Stampa, Paris (2019); *Beep-Beep* at La Marquise, Lisbon, Portugal (2019); and *p p p punctual* at Galerie Levy Delval, Brussels, Belgium (2016). He regularly gives talks and lectures, including most recently *The Banks* at M – Museum Leuven, Belgium (2019); and *Forked Apologies & other stories* at CAC Vilnius, Lithuania (2018), and at Amphithéâtre des Loges in the Beaux-Arts de Paris (2017).

The artist is represented by Galerie Gaudel de Stampa, Paris.

<https://gaudeldestampa.fr/artistes/michael-van-den-abeele5778-2/important-fan/>

Room 1

Sophie Nys, Gregory Polony, Michael Van den Abeele

I love my friends for their weaknesses and you for all your holes

4 February – 13 March 2021

Invited by La Salle de bains to put together three successive shows, three successive “galleries,” Sophie Nys invited two other artists in turn – Gregory Polony and Michael Van den Abeele – to join her for this the first gallery in the series.

While for Sophie the invitation extended to other artists is a form of generosity at a time when exhibitions have become scarce, the present show is also the chance to work with others and open up a space for dialogue between artists and artworks.

Dispensing with any thematic program or work process, the show is based first and foremost on formal and structural affinities and parallels that the artists created between works in progress and artworks that were already completed. The very title of the show, “I love my friends for their weaknesses and you for all your holes” – borrowed from a piece by Michael Van den Abeele –

is probably the most problematic, and where it might come across as sentimental it points up implicit forms of attraction.

The show will be a force field which, like magnets in dialogue, will produce space, gaps, and, conversely, new proximities and affinities.

This project has been made possible thanks to the generous support of Pro Helvetia, Fondation suisse pour la culture.

Room 2

Sophie Nys

Getafix

20 March – 29 May 2021

Who would have dreamed that the very appearance of artworks would be contingent on the circulation of a virus? To open an art show then on the scheduled date is already something of a victory, especially when that date is based on the movement of the stars. Sophie Nys has chosen the day of the spring equinox to inaugurate Gallery 2 of her exhibition at La Salle de bains. In an ordinary year, she brings with her a breath of fresh air and renewal that cleanses chakras and awakens vital forces just when sap rises in stems and mortals take advantage of the season to tackle housework. This then is how the artist envisions this second iteration, as an intermission, to air out the room, expel the microbes, and scatter the passions that the exhibition's first part filled the venue with.

To recapitulate the earlier iteration, invited to mount a solo show, Sophie Nys reacted by inviting in turn two other artists, Michael Van den Abeele and Gregory Polony. The results exuded a clear camaraderie and a more or less sham sentimentalism, along with a serious dose of eroticism starting with the title, *I love my friends for their weaknesses and you for all your holes*. The show featured a number of works, including an abstract painting comprising a blue circle, much too large for the wall behind the desk (Michael Van den Abeele, *Period*, 2020), and, pressed against the mirror, a sculpture suggesting from afar a bachelor machine and up close the need to kill one's father (Gregory Polony, *Deaddy I*, 2021). As for Sophie, the artist contributed two elements that went overlooked among the featured works, a bay tree planted next to the entrance, and a metal door leading to the La Salle de bains stockroom, that is two boundaries delimiting the space and foretelling some future storyline.

It will always be a question of weaknesses, love, and voids, but also of their opposites – a detox is always favorable to a rebalancing of contrary energies. It bears remembering that the artist pays particular attention to versatile signs, the mutability of symbols, and the discoveries that redirect our reading of history which she encounters in the course of her research at the point where archeology and current political events or popular culture meet. In a space that is stripped down yet filled with molecules having an antiseptic power, she proceeds, often by associating ideas, images and gestures that are left free in the organization of meaning.

It is up to each viewer then to reconstruct the scene of this curious purification ritual from the clues that are present on site, that is, a skeleton, a monochrome, a pressure cooker, two yellow stripes on a black background, and laurel. It may be useful, or not, to know that this jaw bone dating from the 11th or 12th century belonged to a woman and the blue dot that is visible between the incisors contains lapis lazuli, which was used in illuminations that are attributed in the main to anonymous male artists.

One could point out, or not, that this monochrome – also linked to a male tradition – was done on the wall with Viagra, which the artist used like a pigment, and that the price per ounce of this anti-impotence drug is equal to that of gold, which is equal to that of lapis lazuli, also called blue gold in the age of Babylonian emperors. In keeping with the weather, some will make the connection, or not, between this painting and the blue of the heavens, while some readers of Georges Bataille will do so, or not, with a novel, thinking back, or not, to the

fate of Dirty, Lazare, and Xénie. Speaking of drugs, it might be known, or not, that Getafix is the first name of the druid in the British version of the adventures of the Gaul Asterix.

People are aware, or not, of the gilded crowns of bay leaves in Lyon's Musée Gallo-Romain but people certainly know about the activities of the group of the American far-right militants calling themselves the Proud Boys who have adopted as their uniform the black and yellow Fred Perry polo shirts sporting two stripes and a crown of bay leaves. People have also heard them calling for the creation of a modern world, extolling violence, and venerating women's supposed place in the home...

If you drop by in the spring, you will see, or not, the gardener-botanist Jean-Pierre Griénay, from the La Tête d'or park, tending to a bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) – which is a common species despite the nobilis – and trying to clip and trim it into the shape of a victor's crown, which he will succeed in doing, or not.

In any case, though, the cut leaves will be well boiled in a pressure cooker dreamed up by the designer Enzo Mari and called Mama.

Room 3

Sophie Nys

Mouchoirs et Crachoirs (Handkerchiefs and Spittoons)

10 June – 3 July 2021

Sophie Nys's interest in inventories can be seen in the artist's books she has produced in the past few years. They include, for example, pierres à vinaigre ("vinegar stones"), public fountains, decorated waffle irons, even statuettes of a saint who was a victim of the plague. For the final iteration of Sophie's show at La Salle de bains, the artist would like to pay homage once again to an object with an everyday use in days past. With its modest size – which places it midway between an object and a piece of furniture – and the doubt surrounding its use – when, long after the period that witnessed its use, it might be taken for a vase, a night stand, a pedestal, even a piece of sculpture – it fits in with many of the artist's formal concerns. While her sympathy for holes was surely noticed from her first gallery, let's not forget that Sophie is also fond of containers – especially when what is contained is questionable.

In this regard, we can refer to the text by Doctor Gustave Jorissenne that is reproduced in the third exhibition booklet, recommending in 1900 the combined use of a spittoon and a handkerchief for a content adapted to the kind of fluid and its trajectory. While the scientific precision of the good doctor's words links them to the general instructions recently deployed for making good use of surgical masks by the public, it is striking to see the influence of mores and medical advances on the appearance and disappearance of objects in public and private spaces.

As can be seen in a series of designs by Joseph Danhauser conserved along with their models in Vienna's Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), the spittoon, like any technical innovation, was the focus of sustained exploration in terms of style, displaying a broad decorative vocabulary or, on the contrary, seeking the pared-down simplicity of pure functionalism. Enumerating these examples devoid of their context (their solitude is underscored by the shadows cast around them) inevitably conjures up the variety of architectures they once matched, projecting viewers into other dimensions and scales. For the artist always pays close attention – even if it means making mischief – to the postures and movements of bodies that are more or less prompted by the objects that are available in a given space. This of course holds for the spittoon, but viewers may also catch a distant reference to the stations of the cross in the rigorous display, one after another, of the drawings that religiously reproduce Danhauser's watercolors along the perimeter of La Salle de bains. Other objects positioned at different heights suggest a more original or less suitable ergonomics, a mere hint that could be encouraged by the obsessive character of this passion for spittoons that has been given expression in this way.

Like the fresco done with Viagra powder in the earlier gallery, here, too, it is important to pay attention to the materials employed to grasp the circular movement which this exhibition has been caught up in from the very start. The brown fluid deposited on the mint-colored (or nursing-home colored) sheets of paper is none other than the residue collected after boiling the winners' bay leaves from the laurel tree that had made its entrance in the first gallery, accompanied by the door which now seems to be bidding us farewell.

This project has been made possible thanks to the generous support of Flanders, state of the art.

LA SALLE DE BAINS

La Salle de bains is an association (law 1901) dedicated to the production and the diffusion of contemporary art. It was created in Lyon in 1998 by a group of artists and designers in the heritage of artist run spaces (such as *The Kitchen* which has existed since 1971 in New York). Therefore, it has been characterised by a sharp, forward-looking and international programming, affirming its commitment to a decentralised cultural requirement. It has thus organised the first exhibitions in France of artists who have become major figures on the art scene.

Since 2016, and after several seasons *hors les murs*, La Salle de bains has relocated to a small space in the centre of the city from where a programme is developed according to modalities induced by the size of its premises and deduced from a certain vision of the sharing of art in public space and time. Each invitation made to the artists gives rise to the production of a project in three stages, three appointments given to the public here or there, in the premises of La Salle de bains or elsewhere in the city, like three chapters of the same story, three rooms of an exhibition in an extended definition. This format is conjunctural and transitory. As long as it is applied as a framework for artistic programming, it invites us to perceive and think about the works as much as the ways in which they appear.

La Salle de bains

1 rue Louis Vitet

69001 Lyon - FR

Open from Wednesday to Saturday, 3pm to 7pm

La Salle de bains enjoys the generous support of the Ministry of Culture DRAC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Region, and the City of Lyon.

A project realized with the support of ProHelvetia and Flanders, state of the art.

Text : Julie Portier

Photographies : Jesús Alberto Benítez

Traduction : John O'Toole