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Le saint ennui

Ethan Assouline, Guillaume Dénervaud, Garance Früh, Mona Varichon

Curated by Clément Delépine

Opening June 4, 2021

Exhibition June 8 - July 31, 2021

Le saint ennui was inspired by the central character of *Mr. Bougran's retirement*, a novel written in 1888 by the multifaceted French novelist and art critic Joris-Karl Huysmans.

Resulting from an open dialogue between four artists whose practices address our normative modes of perception, this exhibition brings together works offering a reflection on the mutability of reality, from a bodily to a societal scale, from a sentimental to a political perspective.

In logic, the principle of non-contradiction states that a proposition and its opposite cannot coexist at the same time, or on the same plane. In theory, reality cannot contradict itself. While this principle cannot be demonstrated, Mr. Bougran seems fully determined to refute it.

Bougran is a middle-aged civil servant who is unfairly forced into early retirement by the administration he served loyally for a number of years. His dismissal comes with the label “psychological infirmity undetectable by men of the medical art”.

Unwilling to accept such dreary fate, and driven by boredom and stubborn habits, Bougran conjures up a desperate plan to recreate an identical version of his old office at home. From his desk, he writes letters and reports which he sends to himself, and to which he responds with official rigour. Nothing is overlooked to maintain the illusion of a work environment. To improve his workflow and keep up the pace, he even goes so far as to hire his former assistant. In this duplicate reality, the retiree in denial developed a performative relationship to the world. Not unlike another retiree in denial who relied on “alternative facts” to bend reality as he pleased.

The recent months have been the scene of various arrangements with reality. Like Bougran, we have manifested a relentlessness in saving appearances. From the early stages of the first confinements, we have developed an urge to retain *normal*, substituting sensible experiences for online ones. Online love, online family, online cooking, online conversations, online schools with online classes. In the field of arts, it translated in online exhibitions and graduation shows, online viewing rooms, and online art fairs.

More than ever, humankind did not seem to agree on what reality is and what it is made of. For those who advocated for a paradigm shift, this new world looks a lot like the old one.

What platitude and what a downfall! I felt very uncomfortable in these circles without genuine dignity and without propriety, but ... but ... from there, wanting to leave them ... and, sighing, Mr. Bougran returned to his own situation, to himself.

Interestingly, as if torn between two realities, Huysmans wrote an alternative ending to *Mr. Bougran's retirement*. In one version, the zealous civil servant dies at work, exhausted, in the other, he lives only to wonder how much time was wasted.

Today, 15 months after the first Covid case was diagnosed, things are now seemingly *back to normal* in a few, often rich, countries. Nevertheless, the pandemic is still raging in some parts of the world, offering us an auspicious reminder that *normal* is a concept in flux.

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Ethan Assouline (b. 1994, lives in Paris and works in Saint-Denis, France)

Ethan Assouline's practice encompasses sculpture, installation, writing and publishing and deals with his apprehension of modern cities and corporate worlds rooted in speculation, exclusion, domination. Addressing the intertwined links between violence, decoration, and power, his assemblages and associations of objects and images offer spaces for the circulation of thoughts and speech.

He is also collaborating on the publication *Revue Show and Massage Production*, a structure for the diffusion and production of films and exhibitions. Since 2019, he is the publisher of *Disparaitre*, a periodical reflecting on the modern city, its language and symbols.

Guillaume Dénervaud (b. 1987, lives and works in Paris, France)

Guillaume Dénervaud's work is inspired by the critical approach of science fiction writers such as Liu Cixin, J. G. Ballard, Octavia E. Butler or Ursula K. Le Guin, on the development of contemporary societies, especially with regards to ecology, politics, and technology. His research takes the form of installations combining drawings, paintings, sculptures, light fixtures and texts. They create eerie atmospheres staging the tensions between nature and industry, bodies and technologies, urbanism and surveillance.

Garance Früh (b. 1992, lives and works in Paris, France)

Garance Früh explores the politics and poetics of eroticism, her practice considers sensual tension and the reversal of power relations. Reflecting upon the intimate, she aims at questioning the normative codes and values associated with gender. Her mixed-media installations evoke the occasional failure of gestures of care, seemingly carrying out a gentle process in a brutal way, or vice versa. Her sculptures bespeak an empathy for the human body, more specifically the viewers' bodies, who connect empirically with the work.

Mona Varichon (b. 1989, lives and works in Paris, France)

Informed by her studies in sociology, Mona Varichon's work captures and complicates current events through videos, photographic series, and archives both physical and digital. She is interested in issues of visibility, transmission and legitimacy.

She runs the independent press *Varichon & Cie*, which will be publishing a French translation of *Licorice Candies* by Argentinian author Cecilia Pavón, and a French-English reissue of *Reflections from a cinematic cesspool*, the memoirs of American experimental filmmakers George and Mike Kuchar.

Clément Delépine (b. 1981, lives and works in Paris, France)

Clément Delépine is an independent curator and critic and the current Co-Director of the art fair *Paris Internationale*. He is interested in providing new perspectives for celebrated works and established artists and encouraging the recognition of young artists in institutional contexts. In the Fall of 2020, he was invited to coordinate *Galleries Curate: RHE*, a global initiative designed to express the dynamic dialogue between 21 international galleries.

Clément Delépine is also the current Art Editor at *Large of Novembre Magazine*, his writings have appeared in various publications such as *Bomb Magazine*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Cura*, *L'Officiel Art*.