

“The negative version of the official version of things”

Curated by Julie Beauflis

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Beneath the official version of history, other unofficial versions often develop, like film negatives from a series of photos. These can be histories with a capital “H,” as much as popular stories that are transmitted from generation to generation, from lips to ears. In “What Is the Contemporary?” Agamben writes : “The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity.”¹ History, as we know it, and as we are included in it, forms around the writings of those who have won wars, conquered kingdoms, imposed laws, and had the chance to tell the stories of those struggles. The voices of others—the oppressed, the dissenting—are heard in other ways. Surviving through writing and visual arts, these voices are shared like underlying testimonies, though they are no less precious and no less authentic. Through the power of their narratives and the strength of their images, these alternative histories sometimes even succeed at overriding the official version.

On a scale beyond that of our world, the universe contains matter that is both visible and invisible to our human eyes. The latter is what astrophysicists call “dark matter,” which, according to recent studies, is much more dense and widespread than visible matter. Its presence is detected because it takes up a great deal of space and thus maintains the compact order of visual elements. As such, luminous matter and dark matter balance one another throughout the universe.

Drawing from this metaphor, the concept here is to show how the practices of 11 contemporary artists exist and coexist in the world today. Each is situated within a constellation of references from personal experience, popular culture, and pieces of western and non-western art history. Looking at their work, we can reflect on what it means to be “contemporary” today, and what it means to have access to so many references simultaneously. The omnipresence of social media leads us to reconsider the origins of information, to toggle between public and private, to follow or not to follow a profile illuminated by its number of followers. Faced with multiple versions of the same fact or story, we must question the authenticity of the source, the sovereignty of which is challenged each time. Although this constant questioning can at times be disconcerting, it can also become valuable by allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives and a diversity of narratives. At a time when certain large companies have as much or even more power than governments, the relationship between official and unofficial is no longer binary but gives way to an assembly of voices. The selection of criteria for determining the value of one narrative over another remains as relevant as ever.

The current exhibition proposes to see how, in this contemporary era, artists make visible what might not be already, what is held in the shadows by a light too blinding.

J.B

¹ Giorgio Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?” in *What is an Apparatus?* and *Other Essays* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 45.

A series of photographs by **Mona Varichon** reroutes and rewires the “Mothers/daughters” advertising campaign of the brand Comptoir des Cotonniers, an emblem of the 2000s-era parisian. The artist had family members pose dressed in her personal collection of Com8 clothes, a mythical brand founded in 1998 by the rapper Joey Starr. **Nicolas Faubert** proposes a performance that takes place live in the exhibition space in which certain movements have been pre-choreographed to resonate with the pieces in the gallery, while others remain improvisatory. These moments when the body is free opens up an infinite number of possibilities. Drawing on excerpts of choreographic work he has produced in recent years, **Benjamin Karim Bertrand** presents videos that function as moments of research or unfinished phrases, which take place behind the scenes and offer insight into the continuous training that lend rhythm to his dance practice. **Rafik Greiss** presents an installation that brings together a photograph taken during the 2011 Egyptian revolution with braille signs fixed to the floor. The break imposed by the braille reminds us of the limits that govern our movements in urban environments, how we choose to navigate them or not, and how we distinguish between the private and public spheres. How, the question becomes, do we delimit our own space from that of others, and how can these spaces coexist with one another? The piece by **Laura Owens** exists as a graphic rendition of the artist herself through a subtle mise en abîme. The lightness of the line and the vibrant presence of the colors create a hypnotizing effect through which the relationship to the motif is palpable and the materiality of the painting is magnified. One aspect of **Louise Lawler**’s work is to document the life of images. The one selected here shows another artist’s work from a new angle : her own. Her photographs of the installation show hidden sides of a public exhibition such that her mode of documentation becomes the work itself and her personal story becomes as legitimate as the official press release. The bas-relief sculptures in bronze were recently made by **Morgan Courtois**. The textural effects of these fragments that appear accidentally during their production refer to the irregularities of the skin. Like layers that have been shed or cast off, they are the trace of past events, a record of the marks that have been left. **Jacob Eisenmann** founded his holding company in 2017. Here, he displays a series of cloth gloves he has made by hand and which take on a new dimension during our current health crisis. As items of style that don’t actually protect against the virus, these gloves nod to the attempts at protection we all create, whether they are effective or unfounded. **Julie Beaufils** presents a recent painting in which the coating is particularly light and the colors have soaked into the canvas. The setting slightly resembles an inversion and the diluted aspect of the pigments creates a washed-out effect that attenuates the expressiveness of the painting like a muted presence. The slender, 3D-printed sculpture that **Kim Farkas** has placed in the gallery space could be described as an empty shell containing slips of paper to be burned as ancestral offerings. Frozen by the resin, the ephemeral character of their function has vanished and instead they remain as ghostly hauntings. Visible in transparency, their presence remains underlying. **Lucas Arruda**’s drawing was created during a journey into the Brazilian forest. Sketched quickly into a notebook, it refers to the mythological creature Curupira, a figure both loved and feared in the indigenous folklore. This is the other side of the Brazilian jungle from the heavenly and spectacular one pushed by the tourist offices. The presence of Curupira is an illustrated metaphor of the secret character of the tropical forest, inhabited by spirits that are often hostile to human presence.