



BRAV by Alexandre Bavard

In November 2018, the first demonstrations of the "gilets-jaunes" took place. Initially, this protest movement focused on the rising price of gas, before spreading to numerous topics questioning French society such as buying power, citizen representation or police abuse. This dynamic of struggle has surprisingly unprecedented characteristics. The "gilets-jaunes" had no leader, yet for two years they met every Saturday in multiple cities to demonstrate, while they suffered significant repression from the police force. In Paris, the artist Alexandre Bavard took part in the first series of these protests, and thus began a vast iconographic research on uprisings. In one of the photographs collected, a mobster is entirely adorned in a knight's armour. Lost in a contemporary crowd, this anachronistic character became the starting point for this exhibition.

The title of the exhibition plays with the sound of "brave", a supposedly chivalrous value, and "BRAV", the acronym of a particularly brutal motorized police squadron that was resurrected on the occasion of the "gilets-jaunes". The exhibition is therefore an invitation to question the relevance of the use of state violence in our democracies. Which individuals are the most dangerous? Is it a group of citizens aspiring to have a better life while using violence to make themselves heard? Or is it an armed group acting under the orders of political power to protect capitalist institutions? Rather than formulating an answer that would necessarily be manichean, the artist stages the phantasmal figure of the knight and the erroneous figure of the policeman, in order to better question their position and role in their respective societies.

The climax of this reflection can be felt in the exhibition's opening performance. "An Eye For An Eye" is a duel between a knight in armour and a policeman in protective gear, both trying to tear out their opponent's eye. A choreographed tournament that is not only a metaphorical revenge for those many protesters whose eyes have been gouged out by police flashbulbs. It is above all about winning the heart of a lady, a singer from another time, an allegory of freedom and forgotten values. "An Eye For An Eye" is a reference to the law of retaliation, a law whose use is generally considered a marker of an archaic society. This reference resonates curiously with the police violence suffered by the "gilets-jaunes": is losing one's eye or one's hand when expressing disagreement a sign that a society is advanced?

The answer to this question may be found somewhere in the exhibition, amidst this explosion of attributes, signs and symbols. Tonfas and handcuffs evoke the world of the police, while articulated gauntlets or an excalibur stuck in a scooter remind us of the medieval period. Alexandre Bavard's research is rooted in a practice of gleaning, retrieving and pilfering bits of the urban environment, and fragments of historical artefacts, in a constellation of ambiguities and tensions. We thus find prints of Burgundian recumbents imploring salvation for the hands lost by the demonstrators. Carpets, distinctive features of the artist's Georgian background, are regularly used in his performances to mark an intimate space. From this temporal shock, from these collisions of values, there is an erasure of all opposition between high and low culture and a cathartic desire to sublimate social tensions.

By sacralising the anonymous figure of the rioter freeing himself from his chains, Alexandre Bavard produces a monument to the honour of all those citizens who have paid with their lives for our social rights. He reminds us that the pandemic, not police actions, succeeded in canalizing the "gilets-jaunes" movement. The flame of revolt may have been extinguished, but the embers of discontent are still burning. There is strong evidence that the pension reform or the galloping inflation are the breaths that can rekindle the revolutionary spark. Perhaps this is an opportunity to remember that the difference between a revolt and a revolution is not just a few letters. For a revolt to become a revolution, the rioters must be able to overpower the armed forces. Those few letters are the first of a new chapter, written by the protesters. It is now up to us to write History!

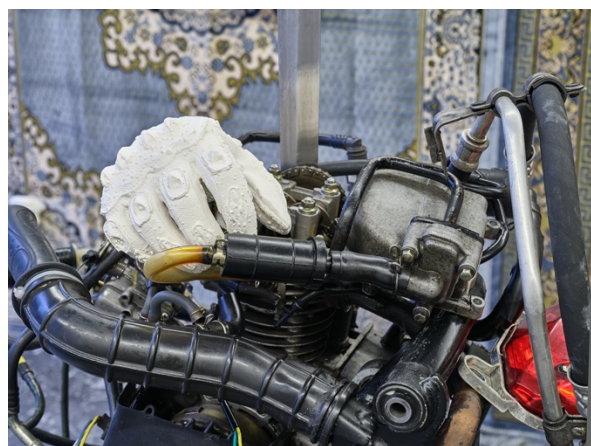
Andy Rankin

Artworks

Groundfloor



GRENAD, 2023
Resin, Cotton, Spraypaint, chain
150 x 150 x 70 cm



1981, 2023
Scooter, Sword
174 x 92 x 47 cm



Flash, 2023
Spray-paint on Cotton
117 x 44 cm



BRAV Installation, 2023
Carpet, plaster sculptures
240 x 160 cm (6x)





Fuck the Police, 2023
Spray-paint on Cotton
147 x 114,5 cm



Euro Flashball, 2023
Spray-paint on Cotton
196 x 131 cm



MOSA, 2023
Carpet, Frame
240 x 330 cm



SAEYO, 2023
Carpet, Frame
420 x 210 cm

Basement



KINO MOMO
In-situ basement video installation
Robocop (1987, Paul Verhoeven), *Excalibur* (1981, John Boorman), *The Monopoly of Violence* (2020, Dave Dufresne)
Variable Dimensions