

The Chase
Maxime Bichon
Capc Bordeaux, France
November 17, 2023 - May 5, 2024
Curator: Cédric Fauq

Exhibition Text

The very title of the exhibition, *La poursuite* [The Chase], is both a clue and a lure, since it's not only the pursuit as a quest that interests the artist, but the second meaning of the word in French, i.e. the spotlight that follows a subject to better focus attention, usually on stage. Attention is crucial for Maxime Bichon, who gives particular importance to every detail of his works (surfaces, colours, intensity) and to the places where they unfold (right down to the "Exit" evacuation signs). This means apprehending an exhibition of his works also requires a specific attention. Therefore, *The Chase* is an exhibition that proposes new ways of relating to the museum and its exhibition space.

Opening and closing the exhibition, two vertically-shaped wall lights (*Anti_2*, 2023) act like beacons, attracting visitors with their brightness. In reality, they are rodent traps that the artist has disarmed and rendered ineffective. In the grammar of the artist's gestures, the disarming of traps is recurrent. Maxime Bichon often acts by subtraction to sculpt, to protect (the first work welcoming us at the threshold of the exhibition is entitled *Antidote* [2023]).

For Maxime Bichon, one of the key aspects of the exhibition was to work on the lighting atmospheres of each space, giving them their own identity. While the first room of the exhibition is plunged into darkness, the second is lit exclusively by natural light, and the third is bathed in artificial light. The last room is tinted yellow.

Yellow is also visible in the wall incisions that the artist has had cut out on three instances in the exhibition space. In each of these *Souffleurs* (2023) – a title borrowed from the world of theatre, which means prompter – Maxime Bichon inserts works from three of his previous exhibitions. The first refers to an exhibition in Athens (Greece), the second to Rome (Italy) and the last to Treignac (Corrèze). Part diorama, part shed, each niche is a window onto a moment that led to *The Chase*. The artist speaks of a retroactive gesture (reactivating past works) that is also sculptural: it allows us to imagine the full thickness and height of the walls as if they were filled with artworks.

Also at the entrance, two mirrors in the shape of a quarter-moon cast their eyes on visitors (*From yours to its, from its to yours*, 2023), reflecting the space and acknowledging the presence of bodies passing through it.

In the second room, Maxime Bichon made an early decision to remove one of the gallery's walls to reveal a window behind it, allowing natural light to enter the exhibition (*Ohhh ma fenêtre*, 2018). This seemingly innocuous decision could be interpreted as a desire to erase the boundary between the museum's interior and its exterior, in line with the artist's conviction that art doesn't happen exclusively in the places dedicated to it. At the entrance to the same room, on the left, a wall sculpture containing seeds (*Hollow*, 2023) could act as a bird feeder. The exhibition might also be addressed to other species, a sign of radical hospitality.

This room presents, more clearly, two series of works which, despite their appearance as manufactured objects, were sculpted by the artist, and punctuate the exhibition throughout: the *Financiers* (2023) and the *Peintures grecques* (2023). The *Financiers* borrow their titles from the pastries of the same name (there's an analogy in form in the narrower ones). The title *Financiers* could also refer to something of a banking, accounting and speculative nature. They are, in fact, impossible logic games, in which the seemingly removable white balls may move under the effect of the coins partially inserted in the sculpture.

The *Peintures grecques* series (2023), sculptures that resemble reduced, emptied hammer holders, installed in each of the exhibition spaces at the same height as the Capc's fire alarm triggers, point not only to an elsewhere, but to an urgency, or even a delay. Their shapes, inspired by empty hammer holders in the Athens subway system and by tool clamps seen at the Musée national de

l'Assurance Maladie in Lormont, somewhere between everyday object and architectural model, ask us about our potential action on the exhibition: is it a matter of finding the way out? A means of escape? With what tools?

The Chase was also an opportunity for Maxime Bichon to produce his first cartoon, featuring a unique protagonist: a caterpillar, the artist's alter ego who, as the work's title indicates, is *The Worst Caterpillar in the World* (2023). Literally stuck on loop, it delivers a monologue that moves from topic to topic without interruption. The caterpillar's logorrhea, a mixture of existential questioning and poetic, pragmatic observations, offers several keys to understanding the exhibition: it details the artist's condition in relation to the world and art, in a posture that is at once tender, disillusioned and vulnerable.

While animation may at first glance seem far removed from the artist's practice, it was indeed reflections on image and metamorphosis that led him to it. Notably those of the Scottish-Canadian animator Norman McLaren (1914 - 1987), who described cartooning as "the art of manipulating the invisible interstices between frames", a phrase that could just as well apply to Maxime Bichon's practice as a whole.

In the third and whitest room, the *Financiers* multiply. There's also a diptych: *Taking Care of Z (extrait)* (2023), the work in *The Chase* that comes closest to representing the dynamics of the exhibition: the attempt to touch, to establish a contact (the shadow of the hand) and the impossibility of finding the object of contact, the subject (the lenticular surface without image).

In the yellow room, a house is displayed on the wall. This time, it's a shelter for butterflies whose title (*Homeschooling*, 2023) refers to the idea of education, and more specifically autonomous learning. These butterfly shelters conceal their inner workings, even if they bear the scars of a potential escape attempt, as if the insects had forced their way out.

Between the works of this series, *L'atelier est son propre rêve [The studio is its own dream]* (2023) is a vertical, white model of the artist's studio, inserted into a fridge-sized cabinet. The light escaping from the window at the top and the hole formed by the door at the bottom represent the studio as a place of passage. It gives shape to the artist's reflections on the locations where art appears, which he has been exploring since his years at the Beaux-Arts in Cergy (where he studied between 2008 and 2013).

At the centre of the model is a table, a central space on which is positioned a set of objects, some produced by the artist, others purchased as is and sometimes modified. The *Out of the bottle* (2023) poster facing *L'atelier est son propre rêve* (2023) is a photograph of a detail of this work table, with the mask of Aladdin's Genie at its centre: an allegory of metamorphosis.

At the very end of the exhibition, barely visible at first glance, Maxime Bichon has taken a safety door out to reveal all the fire prevention equipment. If you look closely, you will catch a glimpse behind the scenes of one of the *Souffleurs*. Also discreetly installed is *Airlet* (2023), an enigmatic sculpture that could be used as a padlock hook or an intercom.

A poem (*Someone*, 2023) is projected onto the height of the last wall. Each stanza begins with an identical line: "Someone Someone", like the witness to an exhibition that, despite appearances, is, through and through, inhabited by the other.

Cédric Fauq