



Aurélien Froment, Armineh Negahdari

Un oiseau passe. Je le suis

20.03.2025 – 17.05.2025

"I was stiff and cold, I was a bridge, I lay over a ravine. My toes on one side, my fingers clutching the other, I had clamped myself fast into the crumbling clay."

Franz Kafka, "The Bridge," 1917 (translation Willa and Edwin Muir)

BAPTISTE – "When I was unhappy... I slept... I dreamed... But people don't like it when you dream... (smiling) so they hit you 'just to wake you up a little.'"
Jacques Prévert, *Children of Paradise*, original screenplay, 1943-1944.

CB: The artist Pierrette Bloch compared her works to "dark forests" in which she had to find her way after many detours. Imagining this dialogued exhibition between Aurélien Froment and Armineh Negahdari completes the idea of a landscape lending its nuances and coherence to artistic creations. Recently, Armineh was in Tehran with her family and sent me photographs of the Alborz mountain range, which serves as a border between the Caspian Sea and the central Iranian plateau. She pointed out the origin of the word 'har-borz', which means 'high mountain' in Pahlavi. I immediately replied, seeing the land in thin, hard black layers, the clouds teasing the peaks, and the persistent snow blending into the brown gradients of a desert landscape, that I saw in it the imprint of her work, defying fear. It was clear to me that these imposing mountains help to overcome anguish. Perhaps these mountains represent the only obstacle to the absolute power of the proud monsters operating below. And what if the landscape—Pierrette's forest, Armineh's mountain—was the inalienable part of human resistance, the place where the psyche manages to free itself from the forces seeking to annihilate it? Aurélien thinks so too. He understands the influence of the Drôme landscape on the Facteur Cheval and how the stones dictated a new mission to him during his mail rounds. The peculiar shapes of the stones freed his mind to the point of plunging him into a dream that separated him from the world while reflecting it.

To recount this adventure spanning over thirty years, Aurélien allows us to rediscover this architectural creation, known as the Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval, by photographing what has become of each stone under the hands of a postman who became a sculptor, mason, and poet. This great mental mobility, this birdlike life, Aurélien records using the simplest of means: a black fabric (which Aby Warburg would have appreciated) to articulate time differently, without breaking the organic link between the ornamentalations and the fantastic



creatures guarding the spaces of contemplation and worship. Silence is barely disturbed by the words Cheval carved into the stone—words that express the desire to understand the meaning of his life.

Through photography, Aurélien reconnects with Cheval's inner rhythm, and like Armineh, he too could recognize himself in the bird's sharp vision.

Many birds nest in Armineh's drawings. Remarkably, they do so on human heads. A simple pillow in Armineh's work becomes a mound where something slower and more serious unfolds than the fleeting fate of a soft shape. This exhibition aims to show the traces left by these dreamers—dreamers who cannot be torn away from concrete action, the manual labor that sustains them. A part of them will always roam audaciously, hidden in a dark forest. Aurélien's fabric is a piece of that darkness, one that continues into reality. Armineh, for her part, brings back this darkness with equally simple means that she associates with cave art.

I see these artists looking at what has no age. I see them pushing themselves with constancy so that nothing and no one can, like Kafka's human bridge, violently interrupt them when, like Baptiste in *Children of Paradise*, they dream of difference.

IA: *I Came to Leave [Je suis venu-e pour partir]*, a pastel by Armineh Negahdari dated 2024, depicts a barely human body—stone or a mass of black and red matter—with a vaguely sketched head chasing a shape that is both a headpiece and a condiment: a garlic bulb or a half-onion. The instability of bodies in Armineh's drawings—fragmented, dotted, often mineral, sometimes vegetal, occasionally adorned with Persian letters—echoes Aurélien Froment's method of working, who, for twenty years, has explored other artistic identities to the point of nearly disappearing behind them.

Utopian and humble, the companions Aurélien invokes create alternative models to those proposed by a traditional history of art centered on heroic and solitary figures. The people gathered around Paolo Soleri, the architect of an earthen city in the Arizona desert, the German educator Friedrich Fröbel, who strongly advocated for an education open to children's creativity, and more recently, the filmmaker and set photographer Pierre Zucca or Louis Wolfson, "the student in schizophrenic languages", are all artists taking unconventional paths—paths Aurélien has explored alongside them in recent years.

It is substitution, or rather transmutation, that connects the practices of the two artists chosen for this exhibition. There is something of a constant transformation, the possibility of a perpetually fluid state, in each of their work. In this way, they propose a new conclusion to Kafka's 1917 short story and to the tragic fate of a man-bridge, a victim of others' senseless violence. It is not the obsessive solidity of the structure that allows one to escape violence—or to recover once it has occurred—but rather the ability to deconstruct what once



seemed fundamental: a presumed identity, a place of birth, a group affiliation, a preconceived idea of 'others' or 'life' itself.

When he took on the Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval in his 2013 photographic series, Aurélien studied "the work of a single man" piece by piece, cataloging some of the stones that form the whole. This allowed for a detailed observation of their powerful polysemy. *Limit-life [Vie-limite]*, a triptych by Armineh dated 2021, depicts a body stretched until it becomes a bird's neck, spitting out a bubble-face, and figurines seemingly fossilized along the path, engaged in a conversation with neither beginning nor end. There is no doubt that the fate of the beings described here is imbued with violence. The only strategy is bifurcation—"a bird passes. I follow it."

Armineh Negahdari was born in Tehran (Iran) in 1994. She currently lives in Bordeaux (FR). She received a Master's degree in painting from the University of Art and Architecture of Tehran in 2019 and a Higher National Diploma of Plastic Expression from École Supérieure d'Art de Clermont-Ferrand in 2022. Her work has been shown in the group exhibitions "Souvenir Nouveau" (cur. Anne Bonnin) at Le Grand Café in Saint-Nazaire (FR) and "Tageldimde/Middlegate" (cur. Philippe van Cauteren and Pierre Muylle) at Cultuurcentrum de Werft, Geel (BE) in 2023; in "Dislocations" (cur. Marie-France Bernadac and Daria de Beauvais) at Palais de Tokyo in 2024. More recently, she participated to Sara Bichao's show at Galeria Filomena Soares in Lisbon (cur. Noël Le Roux) and to the new display of the collections at MAMC+ Saint-Etienne (cur. Aurélie Voltz and Alexandre Quoi). Marcelle Alix will present her work at Art Basel Statements in June 2025.

Aurélien Froment was born in Angers (FR) in 1976, he lives in Edinburgh (Scotland). His works has been the subject of solo exhibitions internationally, among them Institut pour la photographie, Lille, FR (2021); M-Museum, Leuven, BE (2017); Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, DE (2015); Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine, FR (2011); Wattis Institute, San Francisco, US (2009); Gasworks, London, UK (2009); Bonniers Konsthalle, Stockholm, SW (2009); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2008). He participated in the Sydney Biennial (2014); Venice Biennial (2013); Lyon Biennial (2011) and Gwangju Biennial (2010). In 2014, the exhibition "Fröbel Fröbeled" toured from Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver to Villa Arson, Nice; Spike Island, Bristol; Heidelberger Kunstverein and Le Plateau, frac île-de-france, Paris. His first monograph, *Three Double Tales*, was published in French, German and English (Dent-de-Leone ed.) in 2018. His visual work around set photographer and filmmaker Pierre Zucca has been presented at Rencontres Photographiques d'Arles in 2023.

The show "Un oiseau passe. Je le suis" is organized at the occasion of the release of the book *Le Palais Idéal du Facteur Cheval* by Delpire and co. A

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public conversation between the artists and Frédéric Legros, director of Palais Idéal, will be organized for the finissage.



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