

BTS
by Théo Casciani for '*Un Captif Amoureux*',
A solo show by Arthur Poujois at ZÉRUÏ, London

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The more time passes, the more I come to wonder what might be hiding behind it. I don't know why, but the teenager fascinated by images and surfaces that I used to be has grown into a far more suspicious, scrupulous and curious adult. To put it bluntly, I am no longer satisfied with what is merely shown to me. I don't know if it's anything to be proud of, I don't believe curiosity killed the proverbial cat, but my former insouciance has been replaced by an unrelenting drive to uncover what is hidden. Lately, I've often felt the urge to locate the invisible part of whatever appears before me, corpses I'm asked to recognize while they are still warm, rumours I'm asked to deny even as I don't understand them, or artworks I'm asked to interpret although I'm just a writer. It's a profound change, a heavy tendency and a painful responsibility, but if life's contingencies have thus deprived me of the innocence I held so dear, if it took me some time to realize that I was no longer the same, it's only by talking with Arthur that I understood I simply could no longer accept what we usually call reality.

I've known Arthur for many years, nearly a decade I think. We were introduced by a mutual friend I cared for deeply, at a dinner in Paris if I remember correctly, and I was immediately seduced by his cryptic rhetoric, whimsical style and boundless enthusiasm. Some might find his attitudes complex, eccentric or nebulous; as for me, I had immediately wanted to unravel his enigmas. We've been close ever since, moving across cities and projects, sharing myths, sadness and discoveries along the way. We would discuss painting, of course, and literature, a lot. One sentence would respond to another, one fiction to another, and we exchanged these stories like the travels we never went on together. A few names reappeared frequently in our dialogues: Genet, whom I never understood but whom he loves so dearly that he borrowed the title of this exhibition from him; García Lorca, Boccaccio, Madame de Staël and all the authors whose visions I wanted him to illustrate. And Rimbaud, whose *Illuminations* we both encountered during our childhoods far from the big city. Except that, in his case, his early life unfolded exactly where the poet was born. Yes, Arthur comes from the very same town. I am too fond of mathematics and magic to believe that this could be a coincidence.

We talked at length about Arthur's proposal for his solo show at ZÉRUÏ, original, as always, and wide-ranging, as never before, first on the phone, between a Northern capital and the French Riviera, then between the French Riviera and a Northern capital, then in person, in London, just a few weeks ago, at the end of a cute party when he took me aside to ask me to write this text. I'll be honest, as much as I'm able: I must admit that I never do this, not even for my nearest and dearest. I'm afraid it might bore me. Although Arthur is one of my best friends, I needed something more to convince me. He spoke in detail about the series of drawings he was planning to frame himself and hang in front of the windows, about the large photographic prints resulting from hours in a darkroom experimenting with matter and time,

about the translucent printed panels interwoven with discarded clothes and up-cycled objects he wanted to disperse across the space. And finally, most notably, about the set of three wooden and copper boxes he was so obsessed with, meticulously burnt, painstakingly oxidized then sublimated; three boxes to be placed on the floor and whose curtain could be drawn to reveal their own worlds.

As you might have guessed, my awakening had pushed me towards new fads, be they psychoanalysis, anticipation and illusions, gravitational waves, virtual reality or algorithmic equations, in short, any method that would enable me to grasp what lies beyond the visible, the explainable or the obvious. One of them were dioramas, from the most popular to the most prestigious, from the most secular to the most sacred, those of *Final Fantasy* that I had collected for a long time, those of Dominique Gonzalez-Forester, that I adore, and those of the military battles, that disgust me, and those I invented for myself with words just like the ones Arthur was crafting. I could already envision the audience bending over to unveil these miniature cosmogonies, transported between dimensions at the speed of gaze. I remember a wonderful line by Clarice Lispector: "I'm convinced that the universe never began". This sentence gave me the idea, several years ago, of imagining a science-fiction book to be called *Model*, a simulation whose parameters can be adjusted by navigating from one scale to another. I had already devised its laws, figures and culture. But not yet its image. Not yet, until I discovered these three theatres and their curved backdrops evoking both spots and stars. This is where my novel will take place.

To build this dystopia, I spent hours and hours watching videos categorized under the BTS tag, shorthand for "behind the scenes". To be frank, these recordings are often disappointing, nonetheless they can please those who seek to know what goes on backstage. Proof that I'm not completely crazy, or at least that my delusion is shared by millions of other people, this kind of content has been flooding social networks since people started wondering how discourse is made, since transparency has been seen as a virtue and since conspiracy theories began contaminating digital spaces. No field, whether fashion, film, music, industry or politics, is immune from these scripted making-of videos made to convince users that nothing is concealed from them. Fake shoots and artificially improvised interviews followed one another on my screen. The acronym BTS kept popping into my head, and each time I thought back to Arthur; to his passion for theatre, for which he dreamed of designing the sets, his position on the margins of a scene of which he knows the codes, the secret we'd shared for a long time and that he'd had the courage to make public alongside me by revealing that he lives with a neurodivergence that disrupts his affect as much as it regulates his creation.

Time has passed, and I wonder what might be hiding behind it. Now, I think I've found out. It is from this dark side that the intuitive power of my friend's work stems, from this daemon that he gets the particular relationship with discipline he follows in order to let loose, from this atypical landscape that he finds the energy to repeat and fall better, to fall again and again as long as he keeps getting back up. As you wander through this exhibition like into an unknown territory, as you approach these aquariums full of well-guarded treasures, you may catch a glimpse of Arthur's reflection as he

strives to bypass our dominant and imperfect systems, like the rabbit from the tales of Lewis Carroll or the hallucinations of a dromomaniac poet, Arthur escaping hierarchies by reversing the rules of his own game, Arthur getting lost in a mental labyrinth or enjoying a dance way too late at night, Arthur inviting you to go beyond suffering and believe in the possibility of other feelings; eroticism, balance, curiosity. If you see him, if only you dare to look at him, you may follow him towards this dream that power calls madness, that dream where pixels and curtains are torn to show you what they hide from us, that lucid dream that you may finally call reality.

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