

Y'a du Zeph
Charlott Weise

Text by Juliette Desorgues

Robert Bresson's seminal film *Au hasard Balthazar* from 1966 opens with a tender, fragmented image of a donkey's hind legs and back, its calf reaching for milk, as the distant bleating of a herd of sheep echoes through the frame. What begins as a scene of apparent pastoral idyll gradually unfolds into a harrowing tale of suffering, tracing the animal's life through a series of human cruelties and indifferences. At the time of its release, some critics dismissed the film's austere tone and apparent mundanity. Indeed, Ingmar Bergman famously quipped, "It was so boring I fell asleep ... A donkey, to me, is completely uninteresting."^[1]

For Bresson, however, the donkey was anything but. The equine animal is used in his film as a way of interrogating the very mechanics of cinema; an anti-heroic figure which serves to dismantle narrative conventions. In line with his post-war French film contemporaries, Bresson rejected the motion of plot-driven spectacle and linear causality akin to mainstream film in favour of a cinematographic language grounded in stasis and restraint. In *Au Hasard Balthazar*, his focus on the humble figure of the donkey enables the construction of tightly composed tableaux in stark chiaroscuro, which unfold with the formal rigour of a sequence of paintings.

If Bresson saw in the donkey a path toward a more painterly conception of moving image, the reverse has often been true for painters. From the prehistoric gestural renderings on the cave walls of Lascaux and Chauvet to religious iconography where horses are cast as harbingers of death, ushering in the end of the world as in Albrecht Dürer's *The Four Horsemen* from *The Apocalypse* (1498), to Susan Rothenberg's horse paintings (1974–1980), which reimagine the animal in her resistance to the rigidity of minimalism and exploration of figuration, equine animals have long functioned as an emblem of movement.

Charlott Weise's latest body of work, produced for her debut institutional solo exhibition in France at Treignac Project also reflects this approach. Comprising eleven paintings, the series centres on the horse as a powerful visual and symbolic motif. The exhibition, titled *Y'a du Zeph*, a colloquial French expression suggesting turbulent weather and evoking the zephyr, the ancient god of the wind, uses the equine figure as a means to explore ideas of movement and transformation both as painterly concerns and as broader modes of inquiry.

Lines, forms, and colours recur throughout the series, with several works marked with smudged bronze or silver oil stick that lends the surfaces an iridescent sheen. Each painting slips into the next, as if carried by the wind, or like frames from a film, fragmented and dispersed across the galleries. The exhibition opens with a scene reminiscent of the bucolic scene found in Bresson's own film, *Apparition*. This small-scale painting presents the blue outline of a horse's head, mounted by a human figure and serves as a quiet prelude to a larger work *Escape the Chariot*, which hangs on the opposing wall.

In this painting, the horse's body is captured mid-motion, its head blurred by the velocity of its own movement and the artist's roving eye, or camera. As it reaches towards the edge of the room, the headless body appears to loop back to the first painting that opens the space, its bodiless counterpart, as if the two were fragments of a single image. This circular gesturing leads the viewer toward the second part of the exhibition, which unfolds across the upper floor galleries.

Here, further explorations of equine figures unfold across the canvas. The first work to greet the viewer is *Galloping Leg Study (1 + 2)*, an oblong work on paper which, as its title suggests, takes on the form of a study. Reminiscent of Eadweard Muybridge's 1878 photographic series *Sallie Gardner at*

a *Gallop*, an early photographic experimentation that captures a horse in motion and helped define the medium of film, the painting captures various stages of a horse's gait in succession.

This work sets the tone for two further depictions of equine motion. While *Amadeus Shoes* focuses on the detail of a horse's hooves, the very instruments of movement, *Galloping Horse Nebula* presents a cluster of horses in a state of frenzied charge. A singular green line juts from the corner of the frame, guiding the eye towards another nearby work, *Locusts Silver Swarming*. Green brushstrokes thicken on its surface into the rough contours of horses, their forms gradually dissolving into a bucolic landscape of lush fields and snow-capped mountains, alive with swarming locusts. The colour green recurs as a visual motif in a work presented on an adjoining wall, *Aeoliphonic Cauldron*, where a large green vessel is encircled by the lower halves of two human-like figures, draped in cascading fabric. Here, the figure of the horse dissolves, giving way to a scene that evokes an ancient ritual from a bygone world.

These same human forms resurface in *Y'a du Zeph*, the painting that gives the exhibition its title. In this work, a chain of bare legs plunges into azur waters. In the distance, hooves emerge mid-motion as ghostly echoes of equine forms. The body appears suspended in the swell of metamorphosis, part human, part animal, evoking the hybrid mythical figure of the centaur, a symbol of the natural world's untouched, primordial force.

A similar scene emerges in *Neckerei (dans le jardin)*, where hybrid figures recline across a verdant setting. They inhabit a space where past and present intertwine, as they bear the accoutrements of modern life, adorned by a bow and high heels, while reposing next to a metallic side table topped with a lamp. The work offers a quiet nod to Édouard Manet's *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) which transposed the pastoral ideal of ancient Arcadia to the context of 19th-century modernity.

The exhibition reaches a point of rupture with *Palio Pages*, a work composed of large canvas sheets painted in bands of silver, red, and gold, looped and stitched together at their base. These works generate motion through their very structure, from the unstretched material they are made of, marked by lingering ripples and folds, to their suspended state, as they quietly unfurl across the space. The work interrupts and redirects the gallery's flow, asserting its own architectural logic. As its title suggests, the work evokes the spectacle of *Palio*, the historic and often violent Italian horse race held since medieval times in the streets of Siena.

The exhibition becomes a spectacle unto itself, saturated with the palette of the human condition, all culminating in the final scene of Weise's painting of moving image, *Girandola*. Rendered in sumptuous Venetian red, the work nods to the tradition of early modern painting and its affinity for heightened theatricality. In contrast to the bucolic idylls found elsewhere in the exhibition, *Girandola* presents an opulent Italian interior anchored by flamboyant chandeliers, around which a mass of naked bodies gathers. What begins as a tableau of decadence, ripe with erotic charge, gradually reveals itself as a scene of violent potential, the aftermath of an unspoken undoing.

The edge of the painting remains unfinished, exposing the coarse texture of the raw canvas that stretches outwards like an open wound. A haunting sense of stillness settles, reverberating with the quiet gravity of Bresson's cinema that inspired this inquiry. The artifice of painting unravels, turning in on itself. In this sense, Weise's work becomes a reflection on the medium of painting itself, peeling back its inherited traditions and mechanisms. Through this process, she articulates a 'worldview', steeped in ancient mythology, a lens through which she reflects on the contemporary condition and the relationship between the human and natural worlds.[2]

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[1] Nico Baumbach, *On Robert Bresson and Filmed Animals*<https://fictioninternational.sdsu.edu/wordpress/catalog/issue-40-animals/on-robert-bresson-and-filmed-animals/>, accessed 30th May 2025

[2] From an interview between the artists and writing, May 2025