

At least since a distance was established between landscape and early, flourishing cities men have continuously coveted a fresh, innocent and bucolic escape so as to remember or imagine the time when they evolved in symbiosis with nature.

The pastoral emerged as a literary form during the 3rd century BC in Greece with the bucolic writings of Theocritus, Hesiod and Virgil, which depict a time when people lived together in harmony with nature. Although early pastoral poetry maintained contact with the working year and the real social conditions of country life, an idealising tone and mythical memory started rising alongside new tensions between land and labour. Pastoral literature praised natural beauty, innocence and simplicity from the viewpoint of the Hellenistic city, all the while essentially playing upon the contrast between the carefree pleasures of country life and the threat of loss or eviction due to trade and war.

Over time, the common understanding of the pastoral has undergone significant transformations in the western world, be it through neoclassical painting, German Romanticism or post-industrial English literature.

For instance, during the 18th century nature and landscape were to become the theatre of romantic love in which shepherds, nymphs and farmers acted as lay figures entertaining aristocracy. A prime example is Marie-Antoinette's "Hameau de La Reine" at Versailles, where what were once considered the country worker's activities became reduced to performed folkloric forms and gestures. Centuries later, while surpassing the boundaries of architecture and literature, the idea of the pastoral appears to be perpetuated in Eric Rohmer's nouvelle vague cinema which oscillates from countryside to city, featuring scenes situated between spontaneity and display, hyper awareness and genuine innocence.

In today's globalised era our tradition in longing for an Arcadian retreat seems to have been disturbed. While our relationship to landscape is now informed by a new sense of environmental guilt, responsibility, regression and progress, its reading has evolved towards a more conscious and more ambiguous understanding.

Pastoral Myths is a group exhibition featuring six artists that suggests a singular and twisted examination of pastoral aesthetics and ideas. The works in the show integrate style into a both embracing and critical relationship to environment, land and rurality. Next to a well-digested comprehension of what could be called the pastoral genre, the artists in the show develop a practice testifying to a physical, mythical and cultural understanding of landscape from their personal and

local perspective.

The two large paintings by Amelie von Wulffen demonstrate the artist's playful ability to collage various pictorial genres and temporalities into one same work. Although figurative, her works surpass the subject and highlight a symbolic conflict that interferes with our relationship to the construction and perception of images. Von Wulffen is interested in how seemingly realistic styles create images that are very far from reality. Indeed, the displayed paintings seem to perform styles, growing from the tradition of German Romanticism to exaggerated science fiction. In addition to these works, a daybed merges various readings of what could be identified as emotion-driven regionalist aesthetics. The ambiguous trinity contained in this sculpture forces the viewer to consider the possible link between traditional and rustic ornamental painting, an interwar period etching of a Bohemian village and neo-hippy Tiedye patterns.

In only a few years of time, Jean-Marie Appriou has developed a demanding and ambitious artistic practice featuring a remarkable sense of alchemy, experimentation and physicality. In his sculptures technical procedures and gestures inherent to pottery, glass blowing and foundry become enmeshed with complex narrative mechanisms. The figurative universe of the artist freely invokes imageries and mythologies belonging to the medieval era, surrealism, symbolism, science fiction and the Renaissance. For *Pastoral Myths* Appriou has created an ensemble of sculptures consisting of a beekeeper and two cypresses. The scene depicts an ingenuous apiculturist delivering a bouquet of hydrangea under the escort of trees that seem to have come right out of a Renaissance landscape. An analogical link emerges between the production process of the sculptures - which all had to go through fire before existing as eternal figures - and the narrative elements inherent to the scenery, oscillating between a message of hope and a funeral procession.

Around 1814, Norwegian painters were employed to participate in a campaign aimed to construct a singular visual identity for their country. What is known as Norwegian romantic nationalism is an artistic movement that emerged from collecting and creating a documentary overview of the uniqueness of the country's nature and folklore. Paralleling this dynamic of assignments, which largely contributed to develop both what can be called official state art and a national mythology; Steinar Haga Kristensen has been commissioned to create a new work around the theme of pastoral painting. What we see at La Loge is an architecture conceived in the pure tradition of vernacular Scandinavian buildings, employing *laftehus* (log-timbered constructions) and *rosemaling* (decorative painting on wood using stylized flowers) techniques. Its interior has been decorated with ornamental scenes featuring the days and doubts of an artist and his haunting artistic protagonists. The series of paintings covering the walls are both appropriations of Haga Kristensen's own work

and famous scenes borrowed from some of his colleagues. *Les origines moqueuses (Le scepticisme du doute 01)* pursues Steinar Haga Kristensen's incisive and critical pilgrimage through the styles, cycles and politics of art making.

The artist duo Daniel Dewar & Grégory Gicquel have been working together for almost two decades. Far from being a fantasy or a romantic myth, their studio located off the coast in Brittany stands as a real space of work that shapes a specific kind of labour and attitude. *Le Menuet and Legs* are part of a series of stop motion films realised in 2012. Staged within carefully selected landscapes surrounding the studio and using local clay, the short videos visually and physically integrate the environment to the work. In the same way the pastoral stands as an idealised vision of rural life, being naked or dancing naked in a wild territory is a way for the artists to fantasize the reality of their own surroundings and conditions. The two works presented in the exhibition share an imaginary vision in which sculpture appears and disappears and where carefree bodies entertain themselves while modifying their status towards repetitive and formal figures. The films are illusions, making us believe in a possible domesticity, mobility and high-speed multiplication of sculpture; some of the recurring concerns within Dewar and Gicquel's practice. The medium of sculpture takes on its full meaning in both animations as it unites physical, conceptual, figurative, and representative qualities.

Be it in her films, sculptures, paintings or performances, land always acts as a concrete and narrative element within Jessica Warboys' works. Not far from the tradition of Theocritus' *Idylls*, the sound piece *Super Scenic* begins like a pastoral poem, exploring the countryside as a space for metaphors. Initially mirroring a cinematic technique, the narrative pans from the sky to the ground as we are invited to imagine scenery, props, natural objects and sensations. A system of cuts and loops gradually intervenes – phrases are repeated, words change order or drop out to later reappear like choreographed actors. Similar circular movements, associations of ideas and visual echoes can be found in *La Forêt de Fontainebleau*, a both intuitive and theatrical film pushing the viewer to step into the lines of desire sketched out by the artist across a semi-fictionalised sylvan landscape.

Olga Balema works with found, readymade and fabricated objects, moving fluently between various stylistic reference points, which range from minimalism to Pop Art to industrial agriculture. Through her sculptural works, she tackles themes such as overproduction, problematics of excess and consumer behaviour. The series of feeding troughs presented in the exhibition were collected by the artist and have consequently been standardized with the green and yellow corporate identity belonging to John Deere, the well-known American company which has excelled in the development of agricultural technology for almost two centuries. More than any other works in the

exhibition, Balema's sculptures subtly tickle the sensation of guilt and resignation that accompanies contemporary man in his relationship to the environment. In their sleek painted state the wooden troughs appear to be the perfect expression of a consensual statement about the way humans (ir-) reversibly shape their land.

About the artists

Jean-Marie Appriou (°1986, France) lives and works between Brest and Paris. He has had solo exhibitions at Jan Kaps Gallery (Cologne, 2015), Palais de Tokyo (Paris, 2014) and Galerie Edouard Manet (Gennevilliers, 2013). Appriou is represented by Jan Kaps (Cologne) and C L E A R I N G (New York/Brussels).

Olga Balema (° 1984, Ukraine) lives and works between Berlin and Amsterdam. Balema had solo exhibitions at the Swiss Institute (New York, 2016), Capri (Dusseldorf, 2015), Kunstverein Nürnberg (Nuremberg, 2015), Kunstvereinigung Diepenheim (Diepenheim, 2014) and 1646 (The Hague, 2013). She was an artist-in-residence at Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in 2011-2012 and at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 2010. Olga Balema is represented by Croy Nielsen (Berlin), High Art (Paris) and Galerie Fons Welters (Amsterdam).

Daniel Dewar (°1976, UK) and Grégory Gicquel (°1975, France) currently live and work in Brussels and Paris. Dewar and Gicquel had solo exhibitions at KIOSK (Ghent, 2016), Front Desk Apparatus (New York, 2015), Etablissement d'en Face (Brussels, 2015), Musée Rodin (Paris, 2014), Centre Pompidou (Paris, 2013), Palais de Tokyo (Paris 2013) and Spike Island (Bristol, 2012). They participated in "Playtime", the 4th Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Rennes (Rennes, 2014) and in the 4th Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama Museum of Art (Yokohama, 2011). They were the recipients of the Prix Marcel Duchamp in 2012. Daniel Dewar and Grégory Gicquel are represented by Loevenbruck (Paris), Galerie Micheline Szwajcer (Brussels) and Truth and Consequences (Geneva).

Steinar Haga Kristensen (°1979, Norway) lives and works in Oslo. He studied at the National Academy of Art, Oslo, at the Academie der Bilden Kunst, Vienna, and at the Sydney College of Art, Sydney. He is one of the founding members of the performative artist group D.O.R. Between 2013-2015 Haga Kristensen had his studio at the upper floor of Oslo's City Hall, during which he created a monumental fresco mural. The work expressed itself during an ambitious operatic theatre performance on 5 and 6 September 2014. Haga Kristensen has had solo exhibitions at Vilnius Contemporary Art Centre (Vilnius, 2014), Etablissement d'en Face Projects (Brussels, 2013),

Kunsthall Oslo (Oslo, 2012). Steinar Haga Kristensen is represented by Johan Berggren Gallery (Malmö).

Amelie von Wulffen (°1966, Germany) currently lives and works in Berlin. Von Wulffen has had solo exhibitions at Pinakothek der Moderne (Munich, 2015); Portikus (Frankfurt, 2013), Aspen Art Museum (Aspen, 2012) and Centre Pompidou (Paris, 2005). She was the recipient of the Ars Viva Prize, Kulturkreis der deutschen Wirtschaft (Berlin, 2002) and the Villa Romana Prize (Florence, 2000). From 2006 to 2011 she taught representational painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Amelie von Wulffen is represented by Freedman Fitzpatrick (Los Angeles), Gio Marcaoni (Naples) and Galerie Meyer Kainer (Vienna).

Jessica Warboys (°1977, UK) currently lives and works in Suffolk and Berlin. She has had solo exhibitions at Kunstverein Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 2016), M Museum (Leuven, 2015), Laing Gallery (Newcastle, 2014), Outpost, (Norwich, 2014), Spike Island (Bristol, 2013), Bielefelder Kunstverein (Germany, 2012), Nomas Foundation, (Rome, 2012), Cell Project Space (London, 2011) and Le Crédac, (Ivry-surSeine, 2011). She was part of the dOCUMENTA (13) exhibition (Kassel, 2013). Jessica Warboys is represented by Gaudel de Stampa (Paris).

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