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PREVIEW

The Nerve
Curated by TAREK LAKHRISSI

SOUFIANE ABABRI
JEAN BOULLET
NEÏLA CZERMAK ICHTI
NDAYÉ KOUAGOU
JASMINE GREGORY
VALENTIN RANGER
UGO RONDINONE

12 December 2025 — 17 January 2026
Galerie Allen, Paris

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TAREK LAKHRISSI
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Galerie Allen is pleased to present *The Nerve* an exhibition curated by Tarek Lakhrissi.

"Is it enough?"

The question arises when the body tests itself, repeats a movement, tries to grasp what truly drives it. At the gym, movements become mechanical, muscles strain, and something beneath the skin begins to vibrate. Kathy Acker, in The Language of the Body describes that moment when physical effort becomes a form of inner listening, a way of perceiving what flows and overflows. "Certain bodybuilders have said that bodybuilding is a form of meditation." In this setting of barbells and mirrors, a tension is revealed: that of a nervous system that keeps everything in place.

This tension also runs through the works gathered here. A circulation, a stirring, a signal that passes from one artist to another without ever becoming fixed. Perhaps because I know them, some of them for a long time, and their practices have become intertwined with my own trajectories, through friendship, through proximity. These connections are not the subject of the exhibition, but they shed light on its contours.

With Valentin Ranger, this pattern is a daily occurrence. I see his forms emerge, transform, mutate, sometimes in a very simple silence: him concentrated, me beside him. For me, his hybrid organisms are inseparable from these moments, moments that we sometimes share in the studio. His ex-votos, his paintings, his sculptures carry this intimate tension: a world where bodies seek ways to hold together, to fly like birds, to support each other when gravity insists.

With Ugo Rondinone, the relationship developed differently, through conversations between Paris and New York. A photograph from Ugo Rondinone's Moonlit series reveals other forms of interiority. Men covered in latex, frozen in poses that oscillate between monumentality and abandonment. A second skin, shiny and cold, which both protects and exposes. A held breath, almost hypnotic.

Today at ZHDK, where I teach, a student spoke to me about elitism in the art world with a sense of disgust. Outside of class in Zurich, I run into Jasmine at an opening or somewhere having a drink. In Jasmine Gregory's paintings, it is the dynamics of the market, its illusions and fractures, that permeate the surfaces. Through her DIVORCE series, she explores what happens when the structures of prestige, value, and property begin to crack. By subverting the codes of luxury and confronting them with unstable, raw surfaces, Gregory exposes the rupture and fragility of contracts we believe to be immutable. Divorce becomes a metaphor for disaffiliation, rejection, and loss of inheritance. We often write messages to each other on Instagram to laugh a little at this system, its paradoxes, and its oddities.

In a context where the economy, climate, and value systems seem to be crumbling, identities become unstable ground. The nerve becomes a space of reversal. Neila Czermak Ichti's drawings construct ambiguous, haunted, tender silhouettes that trace other ways of talking about vulnerability. A zone where irreverence mingles with the sacred, where intimacy becomes a place of subtle resistance. At the time, I followed her posts, her tarot cards, her visions, these portraits of strange Arabs that resonated with my own story, this strangeness of being Arab in France, heir to a colonial past whose continuum still permeates everyday life.

That same year, I met Ndayé Kouagou in the Marais, and we hit it off immediately: two queer guys of color, a wacky sense of humor, spontaneous affection, and very quickly an ally for whom insolence is a way of being alive and being an artist. His work questions legitimacy: who speaks, who decides, who imposes narratives? The nerve here is a line stretched between lucidity, cries, and provocation.

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Before pursuing a career in art, I worked in a bookstore, where I spent my evenings reading. In the basement, I discovered Jean Boullet's erotic books, which I saw as a darker version of Cocteau. His male figures, somewhere between monstrosity, desire, and mysticism, slipped from one page to the next. In his unfinished Divine Comedy, he reinvents Dante in a sensual vision, stretched between transgression and revelation.

During this period spent between the bookstore, cafés, and the gym, I also met Soufiane Ababri. A friendship developed around our stories, our reading, and our shared Moroccan heritage. He had also created a portrait of me in oil pastels, which was included in his series I am not just a faggot.... His research extends the history of queer presences as spaces of resistance. His '' "bedworks" and drawings of racialized gay communities become intimate and political scenes where desire confronts domination. The work presented here shows two young men in a suspended moment, between preparation, tension, and gentleness, a blurred time where a form of utopia seems possible.

Amidst other readings, I think of Audre Lorde, who wrote: We anesthetize ourselves with dreams of new ideas. Our heads will save us. Our brains alone will liberate us. But there are no new ideas waiting in the wings, ready to save us as women, as human beings. There are only old and forgotten ideas, new combinations, extrapolations, and recognitions arising from ourselves—accompanied by the rediscovered courage to put them to the test.

This may be the nerve (if not the head and brain) that intensifies the courage to be oneself, and ultimately connect to something that transcends us, that moves us and keeps us going.

– Tarek Lakhrissi

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TAREK LAKHRISSI

Tarek Lakhrissi (born 1992 in Châtellerault, France. Lives and works in Paris) is a French artist and poet with a background in literature who explores sociopolitical narratives and speculative situations of transformation and magic through text, film, installation, and performance.

Lakhrissi has been exhibited internationally in galleries and institutions including Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney as part of the 22nd Biennale of Sydney; Wiels, Brussels; Palazzo Re Rebaudengo/Sandretto, Guarene/Torino; Manchester International Festival; Mostyn, Llandudno; Tinguely Museum, Basel; HKW, Berlin; Shedhalle, Zurich; Fondation Ricard, Paris; Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Roma as part of the Quadriennale di Roma; High Art, Paris; La Verrière, Fondation d'enterprise Hermès, Brussles; Kevin Space, Vienna; Hayward Gallery, London; Auto Italia South East, London; Fondation Lafayette Anticipations, Paris; L'Espace Arlaud, Lausanne; Zabriskie, Geneva; Fondation Gulbenkian, Paris; Veda gallery, Florence; CRAC Alsace; Kim?, Riga; Artexte, Montreal; La Gaité Lyrique, Paris; and SMC/CAC, Vilnius.

Lakhrissi's artworks are held in private and public collections such as Defares Collection, Netherlands; Fondazione Sandretto Collection, Italy; Fondation Lafayette Anticipations, France; CNAP, France; FRAC Aquitaine MÉCA, France; FRAC Grand Large, France; IAC Villeubane, France; FMAC, France; Nicoletta Fiorucci Foundation, UK and Italy and Mauro Mattei Art Trust, UK and Italy.

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VALENTIN RANGER

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VALENTIN RANGER

A self-proclaimed storyteller, Valentin Ranger invents fantastical worlds populated by strange hybrid beings, preferably in brightly coloured universes, forming what he likes to call a "grand opera". A graduate of the Beaux-Arts in Paris, with a background in theatre studies, 3D video artist, painter and sculptor, Ranger strives to represent marginalised bodies through his orgiastic characters, his butterfly men and his heifer women. We can then understand the tension that runs through his work, between desire and danger, eroticism and infection. Other elements of his work reinforce this ambiguity: the figures of angels and devils, inspired by the Quattrocento period – in particular the famous Fra Angelico – and all these images created on computer, then printed on canvas, painted and finally varnished, as if to further confuse their true nature. Similar to the world of Hieronymus Bosch, Valentin Ranger's phantasmagorical world carries, in his words, "the descendants of a society where sexuality and purity would be in harmony".

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VALENTIN RANGER

La Naissance des Oiseaux (2), 2025
Aluminum engraving
35.5 x 24 cm (approx each)
N° Inv. VR25250001
Courtesy the artist

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SOUFIANE ABABRI

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SOUFIANE ABABRI

Revealing queer identity as a utopian horizon and the underlying vulnerability in expressions of masculinity, Soufiane Ababri's works critically and humorously engage with historical works of art and texts - essays and literature - and unfold within a historical and contemporary discussion at the intersection of queer politics and postcolonialism.

Ababri's visual storytelling is akin to an art-historical activism questioning the process of history writing while emphasizing minor histories and intimate recorded events as the point of departure of his works. Deftly weaving his own biography and heritage with the intellectual and artistic output of figures such as Jean Genet, Michel Foucault, Felix Gonzales Torres, Allen Ginsberg or Nazim Hikmet, his works mobilize the anecdotal, diaristic and sometimes accidental as the location where an intimate knowledge based on affinities can engender a sense of community in motion across time and place. Working against hierarchical conventions of art making, in his ongoing series "bedworks", he chooses to work both literally and conceptually, from a horizontal plane instead of "vertically"; from the privacy of his bedroom instead of the studio, emphasizing domesticity; and using crayons and pastels on paper instead of oil or canvas. The exclusively male figures in his drawings seem often caught in moments of intimate, social, sexual and emotional exposure and vulnerability, alternating between expressions of shame, desire, horror and joy. Depicting scenes in a simplified, almost naive manner, his drawings present a flattened perspective reminiscent of both orthodox imagery and Persian miniatures in their collapsing of distance and spatial hierarchy to re-arrange values associated to figure and background, between what is obviously visible and what may not be. Ababri's use of text alongside drawing at times conveys an internal dialogue in confessional or humoristic form from the introspective space; while in larger collage works he paints over found materials to activate a deeper social and political backdrop.

Besides series of drawings and collages on paper, Soufiane Ababri actively engages with installation, sculpture and performance to create immersive environments in reference to queer and clandestine forms of socializing, acting through intermediality and theatricality to reflect on how we record, share, claim and participate in collective resonances of our most intimate fantasies and fears.

Soufiane Ababri (1985, Rabat) lives and works between Tangiers and Paris. Soufiane Ababri has had solo exhibitions worldwide including Si nous ne brûlons pas, comment éclairer la nuit?, Praz-Delavallade (Paris, 2023); NON MERCII!!!, Dittrich&Schlechtriem (Berlin, 2022); Bunch of Queequeg, Praz-Delavallade, (Los Angeles, 2021); YES! AÏ AÏ AÏ AÏ AÏ AÏ AÏ ... AM, Mendes Wood DM, (Brussels, 2021); A Circus Act Behind Bars of Lilac And Blood, Kulte Art Center (Rabat, 2020); Tropical Concrete Gym Park, Glassbox (Paris, 2020) and Memories Of A Solitary Cruise, THE PILL (Istanbul, 201).

His work has been shown in institutional group shows such as Every Moment Counts, Henie Onstad Kunstcenter (Oslo, 2022); Queering The Narrative, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein (Aachen, 2022); Trilogie des cendres, FRAC Pays de la Loire (Carquefou, 2022); Habibi, les révolutions de l'amour, Institute du Monde Arabe (Paris, 2022); Attention, International Festival For Contemporary Art (Glasgow, 2021); Welcome Home Vol.II, MACAAL (Marrakesh, 2020); Lignes de vies - Une exposition de légendes, MAC VAL (Vitry, 2019) and Par amour du jeu, Magasins Généraux (Pantin, 2018), among many. His work is part of private and public collections of FRAC Poitou-Charentes and FRAC Pays de la Loire; MACVAL; Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden in Morocco and X Museum in Beijing.

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SOUFIANE ABABRI

Bedwork, Men in the Sun, 2023
Color pencil on paper. Framed
130 x 110 cm
N° Inv. SA23250001
Courtesy the artist and The Pill, Istanbul/Paris

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NDAYÉ KOUAGOU

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NDAYÉ KOUAGOU

Ndayé Kouagou is an artist and performer based in Paris. His practice always starts from texts of which he is the author. Voluntarily or involuntarily confused, he tries as best as he can to bring a reflection on these three topics: unease, power and vulnerability. The result is… what it is. He describes his work as "quite interesting, but not that interesting or maybe not interesting at all".

Kouagou's most recent exhibitions include Ndayé Kouagou: Here and elsewhere at Bellegarde Cultural Centre, Toulouse, France, Please don't be yourself at Fragment Gallery, New York, USA and A Message for Everybody at Gathering, London, UK. In 2024, Kouagou had exhibitions at Transmediale, Berlin, Germany and Westfälischer Kunstverein, Münster, Germany, as well as performances at Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, Poland and Contemporaine de Nîmes, Nîmes, France. His work has been shown at Centrale Fies, Italy (2019); Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France (2020); Wiels, Belgium, (2021); Athens Biennale, Athens, Greece (2021); Centre George Pompidou, Paris, France (2021); Frieze London's Curated Section, London, UK (2021); Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Germany (2022); Mudam Museum of Modern Art, Luxembourg (2023).

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NDAYÉ KOUAGOU

We are in crisis, 2025
Vinyl
300 x 60 cm each / dimensions variable
N° Inv. NK25250001
Courtesy the artist

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UGO RONDINONE

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UGO RONDINONE

Ugo Rondinone is a distinguished contemporary artist who has made a significant impact on the global art scene. He pursued his artistic education at the Hochschule für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna, an experience that laid the foundation for his diverse and innovative practice. Currently, Rondinone lives and works in New York.

Rondinone is celebrated as one of the leading voices of his generation, revered for his profound reflections on humanity and the natural world. His work is characterised by the organic dialogue it exudes, seamlessly blending various sculptural and painterly traditions into a singular entity. This unique oeuvre diversifies his medium while amplifying his artistic expression, creating two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects, paintings, installations, videos, and performances.

Distinguished by these hybridised forms, Rondinone draws inspiration from both ancient and modern cultural sources, emitting both pathos and humour while unveiling key issues pertaining to our contemporary life. Utilising mundane objects and environments, Rondinone transforms his chosen subjects into contemplative and empirical experiences, inviting viewers to engage with their surroundings in new and meaningful ways. This transformative quality reflects his belief in the power of creating art to alter perception and inspire reflection, stating that every encounter allows for a “possibility to meditate about life”.

Throughout his career, Rondinone has garnered numerous accolades, including the prestigious Swiss Eidgenössischer Preis für freie Kunst, which he won in 1991, 1994, and 1995. His recognition on an international scale was further solidified when he represented Switzerland at the 52nd Venice Biennale in 2007, a testament to his standing in the contemporary art world.

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UGO RONDINONE

Moonlighting, 1999-2000
C-Print mounted on aluminium
164 x 120 cm
Edition of 2 ex + 1 AP
N° Inv. UR00250001
Courtesy the artist

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NEÏLA CZERMAK ICHTI

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NEÏLA CZERMAK ICHTI

Born in Bondy in 1996, Neïla Czermak Ichti lives and works in Marseille.

Her work moves between fiction and personal narrative. Her depictions of seemingly banal, everyday scenes take on hidden, magical and invisible dimensions. In her drawings and paintings, she depicts the people in her life, be they family, friends, creatures from ancestral beliefs, or horrific and fantastic films. In her work, the monsters and hybrid beings that populate her universe act as protective figures, symbols of transitions and the unspoken. Neïla deals with inner journeys, solitude, stories and traumas handed down from generation to generation.

She graduated from the École des Beaux-Arts de Marseille in 2021. Her work has recently been shown at the Villa Arson in Nice, MO.CO in Montpellier, CAC Brétigny, as well as in the exhibition "Désolé" at the Edouard Manet gallery in Gennevilliers, curated by Mohamed Bourouissa. At the invitation of Anna Labouze and Keimis Henni, Neïla Czermak Ichti took part in the "Après l'éclipse » at the Magasins Généraux in Pantin, and exhibited alongside iconic artist Baya at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nîmes on the occasion of the Triennale La Contemporaine in 2024. The same year, her works were presented at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris in "AraboFuturs, Science-fiction et Nouveaux imaginaires". Her work is currently on view at the MAC VAL, Vitry and at the Centre Pompidou Metz.

She is currently preparing a solo exhibition that will be presented at the Palais de Tokyo starting in June 2026.

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NEÏLA CZERMAK ICHTI

They called you "insane clown pussy" They said you're "weird but the pussy is mind blowing" They said "you belong to a psych ward but the head is amazimg, 2022
Ballpoint on paper
32 x 24 cm
Courtesy of galerie Anne Barrault, Paris
N° Inv. NCI22250001

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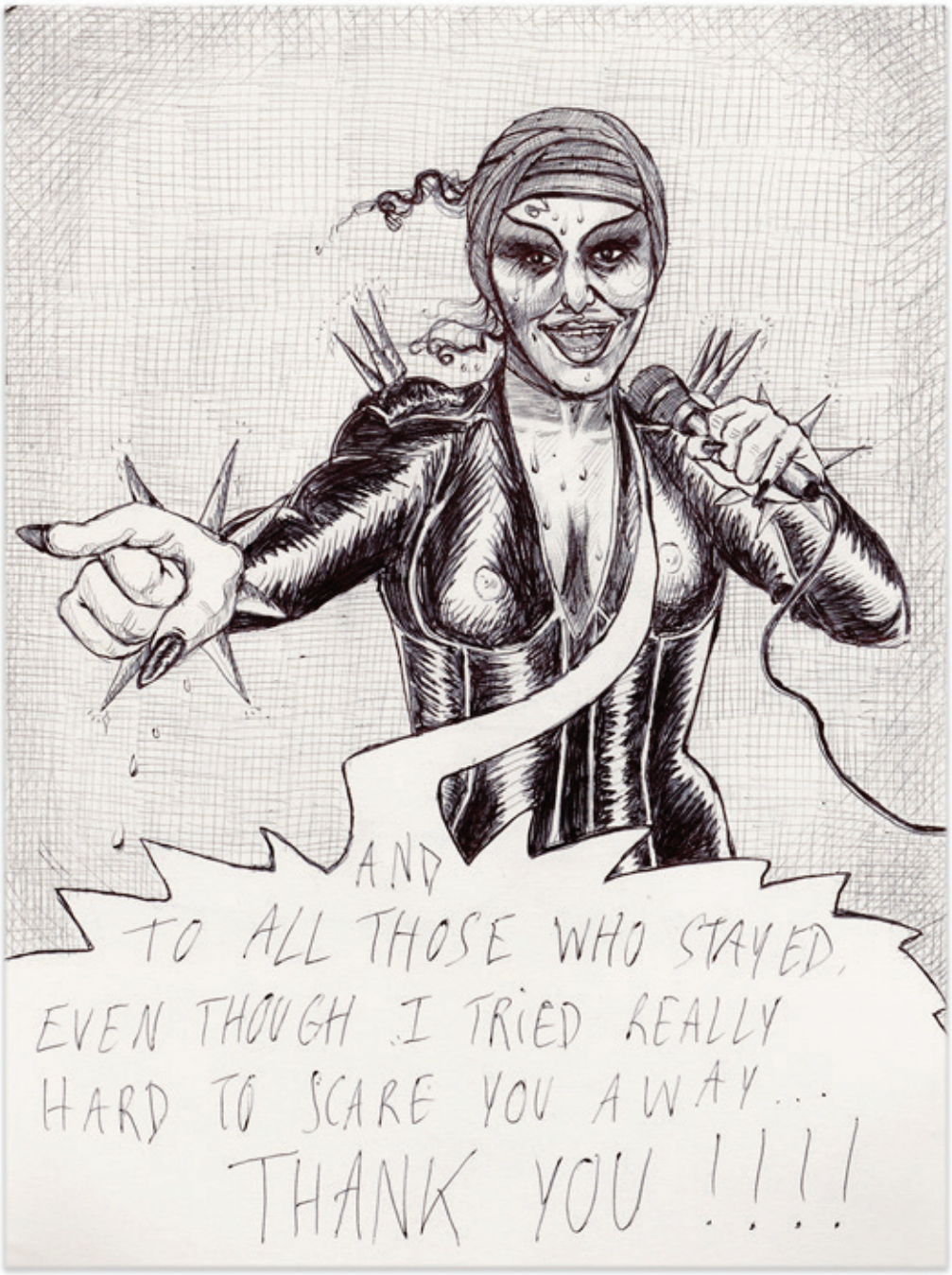

NEÏLA CZERMAK ICHTI

Les amitiés dures, 2022
Ballpoint on paper
32 x 24 cm
Courtesy of galerie Anne Barrault, Paris
N° Inv. NCI22250002

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NEÏLA CZERMAK ICHTI

Gates are closed, 2022
Ballpoint on paper
42 x 30 cm
Courtesy of galerie Anne Barrault, Paris
N° Inv. NCI22250003

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JASMINE GREGORY

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JASMINE GREGORY

Jasmine Gregory (b. 1987, Washington D.C. USA. Lives and works in Zürich, Switzerland) is an artist whose work explores the systems that define value and legitimacy—and what happens when those systems break. Working in painting and installation, she uses language, abstraction, and unconventional display strategies to interrogate the social and aesthetic contracts that structure wealth, property, and taste.

Gregory's work focuses on re-painting luxury advertising imagery to critique how value, desire, and status are manufactured through images, depicting these fantasies to interrogating the underlying structures that make them possible—social contracts, legal agreements, and systems of property. The DIVORCE series uses the language of rupture to examine what happens when those carefully constructed systems break apart.

Her DIVORCE paintings treat rupture as both subject and method. Each work features the word DIVORCE in typography reminiscent of luxury branding (specifically the typeface used by VOGUE magazine), layered over gestural, textured grounds that refuse polished, market-ready finish. The result is a striking tension between the clean authority of the word and the emotional, destabilized ground beneath it. By adopting the visual language of prestige while exposing its contradictions, these works critique the fantasies of stability and permanence that underpin wealth and status.

Jasmine Gregory has been the subject of importatn solo exhibitions including at MoMA PS1, New York, US; Karma International, Zürich, CH; Martina Simeti, Milan, IT; CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art, Bordeaux, France.

Her work has been included in numerous group exhibition Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, Geneva, CH; Kunsthalle Fri Art, Fribourg, CH; Haus Konstruktiv, Zürich, CH; Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland.

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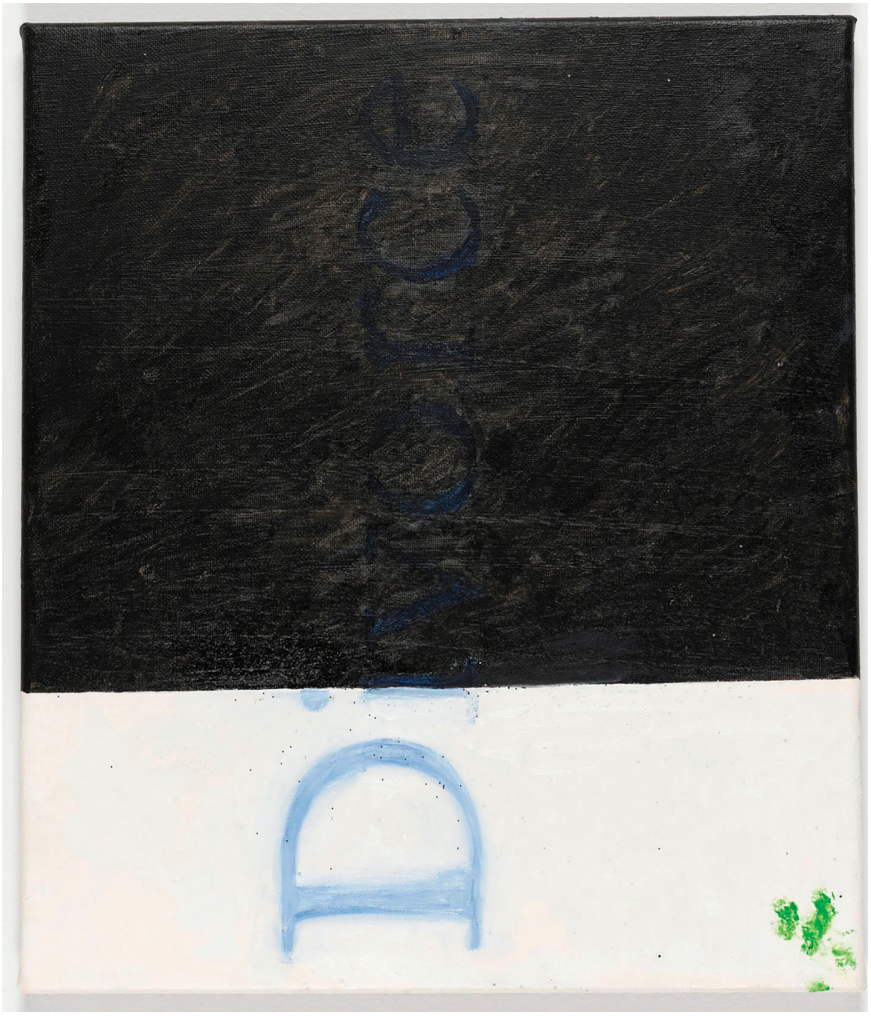

JASMINE GREGORY

Divorce 3, 2025
Oil and rhinestones on linen
36 x 40 cm
N° Inv. JG25250003
Courtesy Jasmine Gregory and Karma International

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JEAN BOULLET

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JEAN BOULLET

Born in 1921, Jean Boullet attempted from an early age to escape his overly traditional family environment in order to wander through the world of dreams. Soon, he began to superimpose imagination onto reality, experimenting with strange quintessences.

Launched in Saint-Germain-des-Prés after the Liberation as an illustrator and enthusiastic critic of horror films, he illustrated Boris Vian and several famous dead figures such as Edgar Poe and Verlaine. He then rubbed shoulders with Edith Piaf, Michel Déon, Marie-Laure de Noailles, Jean Cocteau, Juliette Gréco, Jacques Chazot, Piéral, Guitry, Carné, Roland Lesaffre, Kenneth Anger, Félix Labisse, Lise Deharme, and Michel Laclos. He also travelled to North Africa on several occasions.

He describes himself as a 'painter of masculine beauty'. Curious about sexology, a learned observer of popular myths, keen on oddities of all kinds, a great collector, co-founder of film magazines, friend and exegete of illusionists, author of several authoritative essays, despotic host of his private film club and the 'Society of Friends of Bram Stoker', dealer in antique illustrations, such was Jean Boullet.

He wanted to be an 'illustrator', but his outrageous behaviour took him far beyond that, into a rock "n" roll attitude constantly played out on his own theatre of cruelty. Indeed, blasphemous and anti-clerical discourse, dreamlike drifts where magnificent tritons and repulsive monsters coexist, excessive cries of admiration, tattoos and facial surgery are just a few landmarks in the midst of a desperate quest for childlike emotions.

Dressed entirely in leather before it became fashionable, an extroverted homosexual, cyclothymic, victim of some unsavoury friendships, he experienced a slow decline during a fundamentally masochistic journey, in a climate of explosive gaiety.

Jean Boullet was found hanged from a tree in Annaba, Algeria, on 2 November 1970.

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JEAN BOULLET (1921–1970)

Unitled (extract from La Divine Comédie series), 1946
Ink on paper
32 x 24 cm
N° Inv. JB462500023

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Established in 2013, Galerie Allen is a platform that programmes exhibitions where commercial is the structure of an entire ecology capitalising on the varied experiences of former curator, Joseph Allen Shea, and practicing artist, Mel O'Callaghan.

Galerie Allen supports a group of artists across generations, geography and motives united foremost by a defined independence and intellectual rigour which does not mandate any technical, aesthetic or even material presence.

After 8 years operating in the 9th arrondissement of Paris, Galerie Allen moved to Paris' Marais district in 2021.

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