

Three faces emerge, seeming to gaze at us. They appear within frames — rustic, rococo, minimalist —, frames which, from certain clues, we can guess are mirrors: those eyes searching for themselves, those delicate hands adjusting the laces of a hood, a bow tie, a shirt collar.

A word about the subjects, from left to right, in chronological order.

Herculine-Abel Barbin, first. Author of an autobiography, *Mes Souvenirs* (1868), a pioneer work in recounting the life journey of an intersex person, assigned female at birth, re-assigned male in adulthood through the combined action of the ecclesiastical order, the medical profession and the legislative apparatus, without ever quite fitting into either of these prefabricated roles, and who took their own life at the age of thirty, certain that they had never been understood.

Marcel Proust, next. The archetype of the great writer whose very name evokes, at least and in every language, a cloud of symbols — a more or less vague amalgam of rustling silk and buttered cake, of cups of tea and the dust of memory — and whose *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927) ushered the 20th century into literary modernity.

Finally, Pierre Guyotat, who died less than ten years ago and was therefore our contemporary. A singular, discreet and scandalous author, blending classical culture and experimental prose to recount, or sing of, his traumatic experience of the Algerian War, transformed into a vast military and sexual epic, a totem of the 1960s avant-garde with *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* (1967), a controversial voice censored by the state for *Eden, Eden, Eden* (1970), an inventor, from *Prostitution* (1975) onwards, of a new language, at the risk of relative obscurity.

Barbin, Proust, Guyotat. Three modes of the 'I', three types of text — the documentary record, the monumental novel, the avant-garde work —, three approaches to the autobiographical, which is embraced by Barbin, disguised by Proust, and diffracted by Guyotat.

Barbin, Proust, Guyotat: three names, three faces, brought together here by Cédric Rivrain in a bizarre, arbitrary and sensitive collection. In the oval of a dressing table mirror, Herculine-Abel Barbin is half-concealed beneath a strange headdress, somewhere between a knight's helmet and a nun's cornette. Marcel Proust, framed by the arabesques of an eighteenth-century mirror hung on the cork-panelled wall of his home, appears to be getting ready to go out to some society reception. Pierre Guyotat, frontal, ascetic and sober, blends into the greyness of the turn of the millennium.

The painter evokes their images with Faustian meticulousness, suggesting the meandering course of their lives in the crystalline shadows of their reflections, bringing them into dialogue beyond death and beyond words. In the crossfire of their obscure gazes, caught between Proust's drowsy eyelids, Barbin's resigned irises, and Guyotat's precise pupils, one wonders what unites them. Appears that it may be a certain gender fluidity: the confusion of an intrinsically non-binary Herculine-Abel who, in their confessions, identifies with the Hermaphrodite of the *Metamorphoses*; a confusion orchestrated by Proust's anonymous narrator, this possible Marcel, who, from Swann's Combray to the Guermantes' Paris, from Sodom to Gomorrah, sets the flower-girls and swan-men whirling in a vast masked ball where everyone becomes increasingly blurred the closer one gets; a confusion, once again, of a Guyotat claiming a sexuality that is almost exclusively literary and causing bodies to intertwine in a surge of operatic violence and queer indeterminacy.

Cédric most often paints his loved ones or portrays himself through the depiction of a few favourite animals. Here, he brings these three figures together and, as we look at each of the mirrors, each of these portraits framed within a frame, we feel that a self-portrait emerges between the lines, in the experience of a vertigo of gender, and thus, probably, in the intimacy of a gesture. The challenge here is no longer so much to say "I" as to say "the I" — the expression of a self, the capture, for a fleeting moment, of an individuality caught between the sharp edge of the senses and the mist of memory. The art of portraiture shifts, no longer in a literary mode, as an accumulation of narratives, but in a pictorial mode, as an impression of presence — this art through which Cédric Rivrain brings spectres to life, strips souls bare and brings together viewers and models, as it seems to us, from time immemorial and perhaps forever, on the other side of the mirror.

2

1

3



1. Herculine-Abel Barbin (2026)

Oil on Linen

90 x 70 cm, 35 3/8 x 27 1/2 in

2. Marcel Proust (2026)

Oil on Linen

120 x 80 cm, 47 1/4 x 31 1/2 in

3. Pierre Guyotat (2026)

Oil on Linen

75 x 60 cm, 29 1/2 x 23 5/8 in