

Johanna Mirabel

Adieu la chair

September 7 - October 19, 2024

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, Paris 4^e



La Crue, 2024, oil on canvas, 210 x 160 cm / 82^{3/8} x 62^{11/16} in.
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris / Brussels

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present Johanna Mirabel's first exhibition. French painter of Guyanese origins, Johanna Mirabel creates ethereal interior scenes, inhabited by figures in languid postures. Graduating from the Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2019, Johanna Mirabel is the laureate of the tenth edition of the Bourse Révélation Emerige entitled *Hit Again*, curated by Gaël Charbeau.

With *Adieu la chair*, Johanna Mirabel explores the theme of carnival, whose etymology gives the exhibition its title. While this Latin expression refers to the Christian roots of the festivities held on the eve of Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent, its origins may well go back to cavemen. The cultural varieties of carnival thus inspire the artist, who draws on vast graphic references, from James Ensor paintings to photographs taken in Guyana, where carnival is the most important festival.

Elaborating a body of work that fuses Baroque Western references and more personal allusions, the artist quickly made a name for herself on the contemporary scene. Johanna Mirabel is known for her vivid palette, in which red ochre has become signature, a reference to the paintings of Velazquez, where the color is used in a number of draperies and ribbons, but also evokes the soil of Guyana, where the artist draws her roots. This syncretism stems from an ambition to conceptualize identity as a complex blend formed in relation to the other. For this exhibition, Johanna Mirabel is particularly interested in the concept of "opacity" as defined by Edouard Glissant.

The Martinican philosopher aims to recognize the sometimes opaque differences between cultures, and to accept them without seeking to reduce their complexity and diversity. In this way, each person has the right to keep a part of obscurity, without being made entirely transparent to the other, and intercultural relations can take shape harmoniously while respecting partial incomprehensibility. Johanna Mirabel aims to transpose this precept into her paintings, varying textures and playing with zones of transparency and opacity. In some of her new canvases, such as *Le Dernier Dimanche*, 2024, the character's diffuse contours are sketched out in bright red, shrouded with confident brushstrokes traced in perylene black.

The artist's figurative style thus evolves towards a more diffuse treatment of the figures' faces, some of which stand out through clearly defined features, and others for which one can guess at body parts or head contours. These figures, whose individuality exist partly in the unknown and whom we accept to understand only in part, remain complex beings who arouse our curiosity. These sketched faces are reminiscent of carnival masks, which are important in more ways

than one for these celebrations. They are as much symbols of local myths and legends as they are tools of freedom of expression and behavior, concealing the identity of those who wear them, and thus their social and cultural differences. The figurants in *Paré Masqué*, 2024 take center stage in the painting, though masked with ochre paint. Nevertheless, the theatricality of the scene is palpable, the masks adopting the dramaturgy typical of their use in carnival.

Alternating between different types of canvas, gessoes, light-colored coatings and glazes, Johanna Mirabel works with material effects that lend real complexity to her paintings. There is an air of mystery about these scenes, nevertheless familiar because of their domestic setting. The viewer is drawn in, recognizing living rooms, bathrooms and other bedrooms, though intrigued at second glance by a sometimes evanescent style of figuration. In this way, the artist plays on the familiar to take us on a journey of mystery. These interior scenes anchor the gaze, taking us into the theater of intimacy whose contours are traced by architectural gestures.

This same interest in architecture can be found in the installation created for the exhibition by Johanna Mirabel in collaboration with her sister, Esther Mirabel. Titled *Folie à deux*, it refers to the architectural term of the same name, a construction born of a wager, a challenge to be built in a very short space of time. The installation also suggests the intimate nature of these buildings, expressed here in the memories and recollections that inspire the forms of the work, a reminder of the family's Creole hut in Cayenne. Arches, bridges, and staircases link the structures, acting as transitional architectural elements in connection with the paintings. The wood echoes the large floorboards found in Johanna Mirabel's paintings, the forms also suggest the frame of the body, while the colors allude to flesh.

Born in Colombes (France) in 1991, Johanna Mirabel lives and works in Paris (France).

Johanna Mirabel's paintings depict figures occupying domestic spaces that often open onto a dreamlike exterior. The interiors in which the figures evolve call on the artist's memories, from Guyanese houses to New York brownstones from the Harlem Renaissance. Childhood memories and recent experiences enter in dialogue at the heart of the pictorial surface, creating syncretic universes. Her paintings explore the permeability of interior and exterior notions. Lush vegetation enters the home to inhabit these enclosed, familiar spaces. The realistic treatment of bodies and faces contrasts with the sketched elements of décor, metaphors for evanescent and changing memories.

The porosity between the figure and its environment is reinforced by the use of color: the skin tones blend seamlessly into the shades of the walls and floors, in cameos of ochres, browns and reds. For the artist, these colors are a point of anchorage or filiation with French Guiana, from Creole red earths to citations of Tembe art, a color palette that gains further dynamism in communion with the cerulean blues and cadmium yellows that the artist draws from Helen Frankenthaler's paintings.

In 2023, Johanna Mirabel benefited from a residency at the Fondation H, which organized a solo exhibition of her work. The same year, the artist took part in *Immortelle* at MO.CO (Montpellier, France), an exhibition designed to offer a panorama of young French figurative painting. She participates to a number of group shows, notably at the French Institute in Madrid (Spain), Hôtel de Craon, (La Rochelle, France), Villa Belleville (Paris, France), Manifesta (Lyon, France), and La Conciergerie, (Paris, France).

Johanna Mirabel's works have joined renowned collections including the Fondation H (Antananarivo, Madagascar) and the Museum of African Art (Marrakech, Morocco), the Weissmann Family Collection (New York, USA), the Green Family Art Foundation (Dallas, USA), the X Museum (Beijing, China), and the Underdog Collection (Italy).

Paris Saint-Honoré

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September 6 - October 26, 2024

Laure Prouvost
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Paris Cloître Saint-Merri

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September 7 - October 19, 2024

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

Jérôme Zonder
October 5 - December 2024

Brussels

Nú Barreto
Sensibilité
September 5 - October 19, 2024

Joris Van de Moortel
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