

LA CRIÉE
CENTRE D'ART
CONTEMPORAIN
RENNES - F

C'EST PAS
GRAVE (NO BIG DEAL)
VINCENT GICQUEL

EXHIBITION 23 JUNE – 26 AUGUST 2018

exhibition curator Sophie Kaplan

production La Criée centre for contemporary art

In parallel with the Pinault Collection exhibition

Debout ! (Stand Up!) at the Couvent des Jacobins and the
Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rennes, 23 June – 9 September 2018.

Tying in with the Pinault Collection exhibition *Debout ! (Stand Up!)* in Rennes, La Criée centre for contemporary art has invited Vincent Gicquel for his first solo exhibition in an art centre: a brand new series of big watercolours titled *C'est pas grave (No big deal)*.

Self-taught, Gicquel spent his childhood in Brittany studying and copying the works of the fathers of modernism – Van Gogh, Picasso, Monet et al. – and developing a profound attachment to painting in oils and drawing. For this tireless worker drawing, most often in watercolour, serves as a preliminary study, a quick release from the setbacks and impasses painting can lead him into, a moment of inspiration urgently thrown down on paper or a long-simmering problem of line abruptly clobbered.

Here, for the first time, he is trying out the reverse of this creative process. The series of watercolours painted for La Criée is an extension –

both echo and counterpoint – of the pictures on show this summer at the Couvent des Jacobins. In *C'est pas grave* we find him reprising and elaborating on his favourite subject, the human figure, and concentrating on its role in composition: a role at once tragicomic, wretched and laughable that speaks more broadly to the human condition.

His figures come in ones and twos, naked and stripped of all idealism and vanity – bodies apparently impacted by the wear and tear or time, engaged in curious tasks, in activities seemingly the sole reason for their existence. An existence that's maybe futile, maybe essential. People who are part human, part spectral, their features and actions suggesting in turn fear, withdrawal, destitution, amusement, laughter. A mix of vivid and bleached-out colours fills their bodies, endowing them with life and substance. Paint literally runs through them, in a contrast with the blank backgrounds that generates an impression

of «uncanniness»¹ and timelessness. Only a handful of motifs – a boxing glove, a wall, a cage – provide an anchor, a point of connection with the reality of the world, while the violence they conjure up goes hand in hand with play, sexuality and laughter. These creatures seem driven by a simple, imperious desire to live.

Simultaneously witnesses and participants, they challenge us directly. Their eyes are always fixed on the viewer, producing a troubling mirror effect. They question what defines the human being, its existence and condition, in its awareness of life and death.

Gicquel's passion for painting and his excessive attachment to the absurd and the tragic philosophy of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, are for him a means for coming to terms with the gruelling upheavals of history

and the world we live in now: «I just want to cast some light on the absurdity of everything we do, at the same time as I insist, in picture after picture, on the absolute necessity of doing it.» Each painting confronts us with what the painter is doing and his Nietzschean relationship with the world: what he is doing may seem pointless, but for him it is crucial and all-absorbing.

C'est pas grave conveys all the urgent commitment to living and painting of a hypersensitive yet amused observer of the human comedy. His work calls on us to laugh at ourselves and to accept existence, its obstacles, the passing of time and the end of all things.

1 – The concept of the uncanny was developed by Sigmund Freud in his essay *Das Unheimliche*, published in 1919. The term refers to something familiar that suddenly appears foreign, unknown, absolutely other, to the point of becoming frightening.

INTERVIEW WITH VINCENT GICQUEL

JUNE 2018

Painting and watercolour

You spent a lot of time studying painting by making copies of the old masters. In your opinion, what makes a «good painting»?

Hergé, Bosch, Caravaggio, Picasso, Van Gogh and so on. They were all a living part of my childhood. And as for what all great works of art have in common — their timelessness, for sure.

What inspires you and sparks the urge to paint or draw?

In spite of all the masterpieces that filled my childhood, there was something lacking. I've only ever painted the pictures that were lacking. I needed to see Gicquels.

You've become very attached to oil painting – so why choose to do thirteen watercolours for your exhibition at La Criée?

And what connections do you see between your watercolours and your paintings?

The choice of medium isn't really important. Even if I really love oil painting, I've always used watercolour for drawings, studies of postures and so on. The connections happen all on their own. What emerges from my works is the human aspect: Man in the world. I'd like to think that the questions my painting raises are much more than just questions of medium. What makes the overall connection is love, death, humour, life.

What made you choose to be a painter in this day and age?

There was no choosing at all; I just listened to my body, heeded my instinct. And I accepted things. I was born a painter the way some people are born blind. The rest is adaptation.

The figure at the heart of things

The preferred subject for your watercolours (and your paintings) is the human figure. Why this focus on the Subject?

Because Man is intrinsically linked to death, which for me is the only possible subject. I've often said that death is my favourite subject because life is my favourite subject.

Why do most of your figures look male and seem to be «masked»? And are they the tragicomic masks of the Human Comedy – a way of transfiguring death?

It's quite simply because I'm a man and because deep down I've only ever painted myself. You mentioned masks, but for me it's the opposite: all the masks have been taken off. There's only the living figure left. My characters don't need masks to play out their comedy: they love life as it is. Without having to transfigure anything at all.

Why are the figures in your paintings always looking at us?

Looking is an important concept in my work. One of the reasons they're looking at us is that above and beyond the spectator it's the whole of humanity they're looking at. No doubt that's why they seem devastated. Suddenly they're discovering man as he really is! We think we're catching them off guard as we witness their weird occupations. But it's them who are catching us off guard: they're the immortal witnesses of our time on this Earth. Through their looking we're suddenly caught red-handed in the act of living.

Inspirations

Among your sources of inspiration you cite the philosophers Nietzsche and Schopenhauer – but also psychoanalysis. What influences have they had on your practice?

I don't think you can really talk about influence, but the great literary, philosophical

and psychoanalytical books have done a lot for me in that they confirmed my feelings about things. I felt less alone with them around. In a way they endorsed my vision of the world and boosted my confidence in myself. They're my family; not influences but thoroughgoing brothers in arms.

You once said, «The only possible subject is me and my relationship with the world.» What is that relationship? What's your vision of yourself and of Mankind today?

My relationship with the world is a pretty natural one. I don't try to swim against the current; I let myself be carried along. I accept everything – everything in this universe of ours. I'm intensely aware of what a great opportunity living is.

There's a lot of irony in your work. What makes you laugh?

Everything's laughable when you're thinking about death.

Why the title *C'est pas grave* (No big deal) for the exhibition and the series of watercolours?

What's no big deal?

I probably picked the title for its childish side. Everything's just a set of incomprehensible rules. All we know is that in the end everyone loses – so let's have fun, because nothing is a big deal.

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VINCENT GICQUEL

born in 1974 in Normandie, France

lives and works in Bordeaux, France

represented by galerie Thomas Bernard - Cortex Athletico, Paris

PRACTICAL INFO

La Criée centre for contemporary art
place Honoré Commeurec
35000 Rennes – France

www.la-crie.org

opening times

Tuesday – Friday, 12 noon – 7pm
Saturdays, Sundays & public holidays: 2 – 7pm

admission free

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AND ALSO:

Vincent Gicquel's paintings in the exhibition *Debout !* (Stand Up!)
at the Couvent des Jacobins, 23 June – 9 September 2018.

opening times:

Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday: 11am – 7pm

Thursday: 11am – 10pm

Saturday & Sunday: 10am – 7pm

information and bookings: exposition-pinault-rennes.com

group bookings: billetterie@destinationrennes.com



La Criée centre for contemporary art is a City of Rennes cultural facility backed by the Ministry of Culture – Brittany Region Cultural Affairs Office, the Brittany Region and the Ille-et-Vilaine Département.