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REPORTING
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Green is burning: Andriu Deplazes' first Italian solo show at Collezione Maramotti

When something is burning it recalls us that «we are closer to the actual war that is happening now than we think we are», explains Deplazes about his exhibition

Andriu Deplazes' show *Burning Green*, Max Mara's Collezione Maramotti

The Pattern Room of the Collezione Maramotti is hosting Andriu Deplazes' first Italian solo show *Burning Green*, on view until July 30th 2023. More than thirty works by the Swiss artist based in Marseille are displayed in the space whose name reminds us of its original use in what used to be Max Mara's headquarters.

Deplazes has transformed the space on purpose for the exhibition, thinking about it as a path for the visitors that are invited to discover drawings, works on plexiglass displayed on windows, medium to large-scale paintings and sculptures inside and outside the exhibition space and the garden.

Here we meet humanly yet distorted figures, soldiers, families and animals in landscapes or home interiors. The artist explores controversial social and political constructs such as families, in particular reflecting how family gatherings can be contaminated by the uncanny and how living rooms can be familiar and unfamiliar spaces at the same time.

When the perception of oneself is constantly put into question

The humanoid figures remind the viewer that the perception of themselves is constantly put into question, but reassures them that some moral concerns, regarding family relationships, the relationship with sports and nature will stay the same, just like the emotions provoked by music, remain the same. The animals, whether they are domestic pets, pigeons or cows, are warnings for humans to be aware of the spaces they inhabit. All the scenes look as if they were stills from a surveillance camera, blending the idea of the military and the domestic.

Burning green could also be read as «*the green is burning*», referring to the ecological disasters occurring nowadays. Yet the artist is not interested in an openly direct protest: what he wants to recall is something familiar, something of which people are aware of but seem too distracted to do something about it. The contradiction lays in the fact that when something is burning it's hard to ignore it.

What do militaries, families and animals have in common

The act of burning can also be thought as part of a ritual so experienced by many. What do militaries, families and animals have in common? The very center of humanity: feelings related to life and death. The relationship with war, extensive agriculture, ecology concerns, life that is flourishing even if the nourishment is missing, and nature of which we must take care of, that gives us life, but can also take it away from us.

Central is the emotional role of music played by militaries and what it recalls: cohesion, hope but also the echo of danger, whether it is resonating in the mountains or in the family's living room. Like philosopher Simon Weil says: «*today we live in a perpetual expectation of a war; the danger may be imaginary, but the feeling of danger exists*». This feeling of danger might be what the (imaginary?) music played by the militaries and resonating in the Pattern Room.

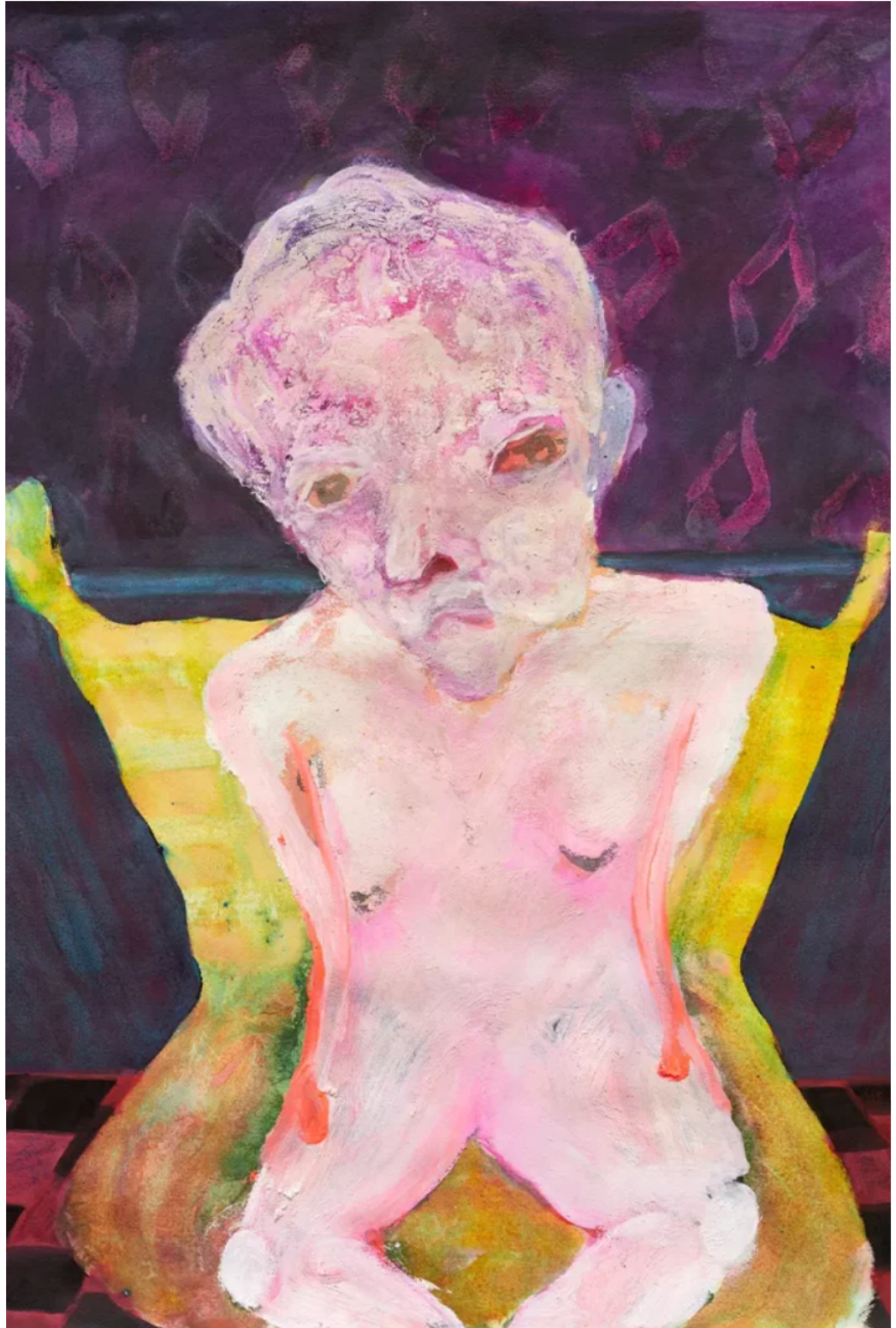
Military music – something that may feel like it's from faraway and somehow very close to us

The artist explains he is not used to large formats but he was interested in creating layers with different sizes, just like a story's climax: «*I like that different measures are put together; I don't like exhibitions where you go in the space and in one glance you see the whole*».

When you enter the first space you feel like you are alone with militaries on both sides; even the pigeons are looking at you. At the same time, the big windows make you feel you are being observed from the outside. Militaries are playing musical instruments: «*Military music, that is normal in soldiers' life, is something that may feel like it's from faraway and somehow very close to us. We are closer to the actual war that is happening now than we think we are*».

What the artist is interested about this kind of music is that soldiers seem to control it completely, as if the hazard was not contemplated; it's march music, it's rhythm but it's also very emotional. The militaries are standing in a hieratic up-straight position, as if they were inviting the viewer to the 'game' of the war.

«*The militaries invite people to be part of the game; but soon, while they are there, they realize it's not a game anymore: it's a war. I wanted to talk about the war without taking direct images of it. War is actually all about power, hierarchies, influencing people, information and emotions*».



BODY ON YELLOW CHAIR 2023, INK, WATERCOLOUR AND OIL ON PAPER 65,5 X 50 CM. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND GALERIE PETER KILCHMANN, ZÜRICH, DAVID GIANCATARINA

The family space – the situation of a patriarch family

Then from there you go into the family space. Suddenly you find yourself in a white space. You are alone. There is a big family around the table, with a person holding a door open. Then you have a parent tying the shoe of the child on the table. On the table is this shallow, jelly shallow with a dead fish's head in the plate.

«The idea was to create the situation of a patriarch family. The fish's head could be interpreted as a Christian symbol, as well as the shell reminiscent of Botticelli's. You have a perspective from up to down onto this family almost like an observing camera. You can also say it's God looking down to honor it. It's a modern family. There is some suffering also, a lot of mystery».

Then we turn and we look on the other side. We see a pink table, two people with a dog and another guy training. On the other wall, going towards the corridor, after *Two bodies holding sunflowers* we see a man with the sport machine (Body on machine). What the artist wants to underline is that it's funny to observe that even though we have parks, people don't go to them often or if they do they use the machines instead of running around or climb on the trees.

The bodies get so unused anymore that they have to be guided by machines. Moreover, the setting is obscure; during Covid-19 people couldn't go out and they used nature wallpapers, the artist explains. This painting's setting is deceiving, it could be completely imaginary but also a forest.

Andriu Deplazes – Cows in Reggio Emilia, Italy

In the corridor drawings made with just a few lines function as a moment of rest, a calm moment in the exhibition. This is where the artist leaves space to the hazard, the coincidence, to a more intuitive approach. Then the preparation for the landscape begins with paintings such as *Milky green*. A cow appears in a green landscape (*Holstein cattle in stable*).

The artist explains he was struck by the fact that in Reggio Emilia there were a lot of monocultures but he couldn't see the actual cows anywhere: «*Reggio Emilia's landscape is flat, monoculture, very green. I asked myself, what are they producing here? It looks like it's just green. And then I thought, where are the cows? Isn't it the milk region?*»: So this is when he thought of drawing glimpses of cows in the vast green landscapes.

In some it looks like the dust is covering the town. In one of the paintings, called *Klee last Holstein verschwinder (Clover lets Holstein castles disappear)* the artist plays with the German title: Klee in German is a plant and Klee the painter. At this point you think this cow will disappear for good but then you see the real cow in the last wall before the last room.

The landscape room: Alps' glow and the cycle of life

Three large-scale paintings in the last room. The mountains he depicts in *Alpenglowen* really exist. We recognize the Cervino. The visitor finds himself irradiated by what the artist calls the 'Alps glow', meaning the natural light that characterizes this landscape, the blue colors the artist uses but also the Swiss's attitude towards the military world.

«In Switzerland men have to go to the military, everyone has to do their service. The militaries are very proud, in the middle of summer, in July, they play the national theme. There is a subtle irony-parody of this Swiss proudness».

In *Two fluorescent balls* two helicopters are dancing in the sky around the sun. There is a dog with a ball; on the background a green field that looks like a luminous horizon.

«I thought about this image last year after the invasion of Ukraine from Russia. At that time we all thought it was a short event but then for me the turning point was when they started to burn all the cornfields and this image is when I saw these huge fields burning and smoke. It really touched me because it was indirect violence, it was not on the houses, it was violent because they burnt nature. That's why I thought about the title of the exhibition too».

Andriu Deplazes – Extreme condition but you have to live on

On one hand you have what looks like an Apocalypse and on the other hand you have a domestic dog playing, waiting for the owner to play. These two worlds somehow have to move on, no matter what's going on around them, explains the artist., and this I found interesting: extreme conditions but you have to live on.

The ball is also a symbol for a game that could transform itself in salvific. *«You can think about the ball as the game where you throw the ball at your dog – but if you throw it too high the helicopters won't be able to fly anymore. So maybe this can change the world. Maybe a child can change it with a game».*

Finally, in *Body holds baby between cows* the topics of the entire series convey into one image. You see two cows and a figure holding a baby. But suddenly then you start thinking that if the figure is not properly human the baby will never survive without the cow's milk. He wanted to show that also these robots, they have an instinct, they are still alive and have an instinct to the fragile, the fragile kid in this case, giving hope for a future life.

White pigeons as a symbol of peace – Andriu Deplazes' show

Finally *the pigeons inside* and the outside, to say goodbye (or hello, inviting us to take another tour). The sculptures are in bronze, with a white patina and acrylic fluorescent color that relates to the paintings. The artist explains why he chose to include them.

«I was watching a TV report about children coming to Switzerland from Ukraine. They were told to create white pigeons for art school as symbols of freedom. One of them wanted to bring it home once he finished it but the teacher wouldn't let him do it. Three days later the teacher received the news that the children's father got shot in the war. This got me thinking that the pigeon is part of our lives, it's a symbol, it's connected to the military world, and from them for me it made a lot of sense also to implement the outside of the exhibition and the other way around, real pigeons in our cities, in our homes and everyday life».

In conjunction with the 2023 Fotografia Europea festival, titled *Europe Matters: Visions of a Restless Identity*, Collezione Maramotti is presenting, in the other space dedicated to temporary exhibitions, *No Home from War: Tales of Survival and Loss*, the first and largest Italian show by photojournalist Ivor Prickett, with over fifty photographs taken in conflict zones from 2006 to 2022.

Andriu Deplazes

Lives and works in Marseille and Zurich. His most recent solo exhibitions include: Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich (2021, 2020); S11, Solothurn, Switzerland (2020); Bündner Kunstmuseum, Chur, Switzerland (2019); Kunstverein Friedrichshafen, Friedrichshafen, Germany (2018); Mark Lungley, London (2018); Aargauer Kunsthaus, Aarau, Switzerland (2018). He has also shown his work in many group exhibitions, such as: Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen, Switzerland (2022); Biennale Bregaglia, Val Bregaglia, Switzerland (2022); Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich (2020); Musée Pully, Pully, Switzerland (2020); Center for Contemporary Art Futura, Prague (2020); Alte Fabrik, Rapperswil, Switzerland (2019); Helvetia Art Foyer, Basel (2017); CC Strombeek, Brussels (2017); Kunst(Zeug)Haus, Rapperswil, Switzerland (2016).

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The writer does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article.