

Press Release

March 22
May 10, 2025

Opening
Saturday, March 22, 2025
from 11am to 8pm

Country Life

Amélie Bertrand

Paris, 6 May 1896

Dear friend,

In eight days, I'm leaving for Greece. Do you wish to accompany me and look at the Parthenon?

If you agree, it would please me greatly. We'll set off from Marseille. Three days later we shall be in Piraeus.

Please say you will come with me.

Faithfully yours

GC¹

When George Clemenceau wrote this letter to Claude Monet, he was 55 years old and the painter 56. I don't know if Monet replied, nor whether he actually went to Marseille. Nothing prevents us however from imagining the scene: the two men meeting somewhere on the docks, it was mid-May and the days were lengthening. Perhaps they had a drink on a café terrace, delighted to be away from the hustle and bustle of Paris life. In a few hours, they would set off to admire the wonders of Antiquity...

Today, we could push this fiction even further by re-enacting it more than a century later. All the possibilities offered by artificial intelligence, deep fakes and filters of all kinds, have accustomed us to improbable remakes of scenes from pop culture to the point where they have become a genre in their own right: *Harry Potter* in Berlin, *Breaking Bad* in Sicily... In the same way, we'd love to see the satisfied faces of Clemenceau and Monet bathed in neon light, their rendezvous set at nightfall, at the entrance to a Côte d'Azur nightclub.

We should immediately be reminded by this image, that before their installation in the Musée de l'Orangerie, the huge panels of the Water Lilies were at one time envisaged as the décor of a salon or even "for some function room or other."² Monet's "aquarium in bloom" would thus, no doubt, have been discreetly but wonderfully effective in fostering a festive atmosphere, enchanting our bodies and putting us in a party mood. Amélie Bertrand, born in Cannes, her own works having recently been exhibited at l'Orangerie, envisages her painting from a similar perspective: a painting is worth seeing, not so much for its subject matter or its composition but rather for the atmosphere it projects. There's not a single detail, not a square centimeter of her paintings that doesn't exude a particular ambience. One notices moreover, that from one painting to the next, there is almost a systematic allusion to an aquatic element: a pond, a pool, a marsh... Her painting invites a certain cerebral and physical inclination, a sense of floating. It could be a sort of visual equivalent to ambient music, a genre about which Brian Eno wrote "One of the aims of this music is to enhance the space in which it is heard. Rather than captivating the listener, it creates a particular mood." Ambient music, which emerged in the 1970s, is a distant descendant of Erik Satie's furniture music and distinguishes itself through the sophistication of its production and the extensive use of artificial sounds. The genre grew exponentially alongside the development of computers. In fact, Eno composed the start-up and shut-down jingles for the early Windows operating systems. For many, including the author of these lines, these few notes remain associated with

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our amazement at the first color computers, their artificial luminosity and their desktop backgrounds, whether gently psychedelic or in the form of landscapes. Amélie Bertrand likes to point out that her practical introduction to art took place at the same time as her first exposure to computers. In the late 1990s, she and her father discovered the infinite possibilities offered by Photoshop of image manipulation.³ This initial fascination is reflected in the painter's insistence on only using CS3, an old, obsolete version of Photoshop for her compositions. Thus, the tool she uses for drawing remains resolutely linked to a particular era, associated with the jubilation of her first successful experiments.

Her use of this software allows her to repeat a particular motif in profusion: neon lemons, artificial flowers, water lilies, wire fencing... Without too obviously touching on it, it's easy to detect a few allusions to the history of art: in addition to Monet, we can look to Andy Warhol for the flowers, perhaps Dan Flavin for the neon or Piet Mondrian for the grids / fencing in the background. A series of works with a somewhat carnal and, in some cases, downright erotic dimension.⁴ Her latest exhibition at Semiose Gallery sees Amélie Bertrand add a new motif to her repertoire, that of the bulrush or cattail: these "false reeds," characterized by their oblong seed-heads that wave in the breeze. And in this instance, we can't help thinking of the blps created by the American artist Richard Artschwager (1923-2013), a form he scattered around exhibition spaces in a variety of different sizes, designed to draw the public's eye to its surroundings. A sort of cartoon version of institutional criticism. The reason we've always had a soft spot for the blps is, first and foremost, the variety of materials used: wood, rubber, hairs... Amélie Bertrand is far from indifferent to this haptic dimension. This is evident in this series of false reeds, whose semi-rigid yet crumbly texture can be "perceived" through the velvety surfaces of her paintings—it's worth noting in passing that the fluffy fiber of cattails is used as filling for Japanese futons.

1. *Monet Clemenceau, Correspondance*, edited by Jean-Claude Montant, revised and expanded by Sophie Eloy, Musée de l'Orangerie / RMN-Grand Palais, 2019, p. 22.

2. Clemenceau cited by Sylvie Patry in *Le Décor Impressionniste. Aux Sources des Nymphéas*, Hazan, Paris, 2022, p. 221.

3. Her background as an "analog" graphic designer, who was introduced to computers, is a point in common she has with the Swiss painter Caroline Bachmann.

4. If you need convincing, just take a look on Instagram at the way some people take photographs of themselves with Dan Flavin's neon lights.

5. The Backrooms first appeared on the Internet in the 2010s. They are one of the best known examples of liminal spaces, seen as huge, extra-dimensional spaces, accessed by exiting reality.

6. In particular, she mentions the sleeves of the series *Space Oddities*, released by the label Born Bad Records (Paris).

— Paul Bernard has been the Director of the Kunsthaus Biel Centre d'Art de Bienne (KBCB) since 2022. Prior to this, he spent nine years as curator at the MAMCO, Geneva's museum of contemporary art. Whilst there, he organized around fifty exhibition projects of all formats and scales (major retrospectives, solo and group shows as well as exhibitions of collections etc.).

These iconographic elements alone are however insufficient to convey the particular feeling that runs through these paintings. We need to say a few more words concerning the remains of brick and concrete buildings, empty of any presence. In Amélie Bertrand's earlier paintings, these abandoned structures had the eerie quality of the liminal spaces that have recently appeared on the Internet: Backrooms⁵, hotel corridors, children's playgrounds... More recently, this absence seems to have been filled and soothed by luminous vapors. We are reminded of the hallucinatory paintings of Salvo (1947-2015)—the Italian painter became a master at giving the most pastoral landscape a feeling of artificiality. Amélie Bertrand, however, evokes the décors staged on the record sleeves of certain electronic music pioneers.⁶ Repetitive, anonymous and generally uncopyrighted, this music from the 1970s-80s has been revived by the vaporwave genre, a musical and visual artistic movement that emerged via the Internet around 2010. There are now a number of spaces dedicated to hosting long passages of synthetic sounds.

Likewise, Amélie Bertrand's painting is ready to be "ambiently accompanied." We might also add that the presence of chains could transform the motifs into jewelry, glittering finery to compliment made-up faces and evening outfits. The paintings are tinged with the mounting euphoria of the upcoming night and party. "We'll set off..." wrote Clemenceau. No doubt the use of this phrasal verb made me imagine a secretly formulated desire for a nocturnal escapade. "We'll get in the mood..." he might have written today.

Paul Bernard