

Press Release

October 18
November 15, 2025

Opening
Saturday, October 18, 2025
from 11am to 8pm

+1 My-Lan Hoang-Thuy

In her exhibition *+1*, My-Lan Hoang-Thuy presents a body of abstract works and a number of self-portraits in which the viewer might glimpse her rounded belly. This series evokes a kind of camp pictorial theatricality: All the self-portraits, figurative or not, explore a re-appropriation of the body, time and emotions. The surfaces of the paintings are created in layers, and the textures are highlighted by their sheen, colors, the transparency of the washes and the thickness of the coats of paint. The surfaces are so brittle and crusty that the curator Clothilde Morette long believed them to be plaques of enameled ceramic.¹ She also referred to the artist's interest for the present and it's "thoughtlessly discarded" remnants: packaging, fragments of dried paint, etc.

This practice of montage is both economical, ornamental and social. The inlaying and overlapping of materials reflects the artist's autobiographical and environmentalist relationship to the present, her recuperation and archiving of its artifacts, just as she does with her phone.² The objects are replete with superimposed stories and "aspects of life." As My-Lan Hoang-Thuy explains:

*You just have to hold out your hand to see the beauty in it. I love working with the modesty of these materials and collecting them for their authenticity, which I integrate into my own natural ecosystem. I would even describe this practice as "ecological": I see it as taking responsibility for the reality of my life and the world.*³

Poured flat onto horizontal supports, these works propose procedural alternatives to those used traditionally in self-portraiture, recalling Hanne Darboven, who employed writing and numbers to mark her presence in time and the act of creating. The forms also demonstrate an interest in precarity and in the political and aesthetic challenges of representing the self. They are sometimes traversed by what Sianne Ngai would describe as "ugly" affects.⁴ The theorist posits that excessive and overly animated representations, often attributed to a lack of self-control, are dismissed because they are minority forms and as such, remain underrepresented. This dismissal is often reserved for racialized communities, affording a marginalizing affect (attributed and produced by the dominant viewpoint), which is also alienating (for the subject of this gaze, who comes to perceive themselves as overly agitated). But in the exhibition, there are no excuses nor false modesty. The portrait-format works are hung at head-height, as if they were looking straight at us.

The exhibition features two self-portraits showing the artist's bare breasts, printed on thick layers of silver paint. This creamy texture lends them a tactile quality. Their sheen and iconography invite the viewer's caress yet also arouse a taboo since they depict the naked, pregnant body of a young racialized woman. Her curves blend into the swirling material, and the paintings are signed with the fingertip of an almost quixotic "My-Lan." She claims that the content of this writing is unimportant. I however believe the opposite to be true because the practice of self-portraiture always dramatizes the challenges of legitimization, subjective affirmation and identity—with the risk of appearing, as in this case, overly expressive, subjective and thus "ugly." Particularly as the image is signed three times: in the representation, on the material and on the certificate of authenticity. What is the point of such obstinacy?

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In 2009, My-Lan Hoang-Thuy printed nude self-portraits on the petals of lilies, placed on the floor in white-painted water bottles. These works occupied the space dramatically, while also evoking a certain clandestinity. Once the flowers wilted, they were thrown away. In 2023, in her solo exhibition entitled *Femme Actuelle* at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (Paris), the artist presented a series of small format works, on which she printed her retouched and sometimes distorted nudes, experimenting with her body using a new grammar that Simon Baker compared to an alphabet.⁵

In the Semiose gallery exhibition, the subject of representation is repositioned: expressive painting gestures are exaggerated to emphasize the spectacular nature of emotion and intensify the relationship between seeing and tasting. The artist transforms the glossy materials and unstable contents of our phones into works that one might almost bite into. She explores the connections between reality and fantasy, between our desire for an object or image and our appetite for it: an uncertain zone where intimacy rubs up against the greedy impulses of possession and mimicry. The artist has often spoken of her relationship with magazines and advertising, stating that she gleaned much of her knowledge concerning culture, graphic design and aesthetics from them. Like every teenager, she would caress with her fingers and eyes the perfect bodies on glossy surfaces, synonymous, with desire, luxury goods and feminine power. They still do the same thing on the screens of their phones, but the depictions of desirability are more standardized, extending to the construction of every type of identity. Shaped by a community of gazes reflected on screens, they contribute, as Sara Ahmed stated in 2004, to the formation of collective identities and new social desires.⁶

I'm looking at a portrait of the artist taken at night by flash. Alone, as she often is, she is hiding her eyes behind two silver spoons. Our ultra-conditioned appetites are reflected back at us by the spoons which act as small portable mirrors reflecting the light. The image is printed onto green, pink and black layers. For once, the girl is not looking at us.

Marie Canet

1. Clothilde Morette, *Bijoux Sauvages*, in *My-Lan Hoang-Thuy, Femme Actuelle*, MEP and éditions Bernard Chauveau, 2023.

2. In her exhibition *Time Well Spent* (2025) at the Project Native Informant Gallery in London, her paintings were displayed alongside photographs taken with an iPhone. Hung in friezes along the gallery walls, these images acted as a visual diary. Often taken in her studio, these photos depicted friends, details, everyday objects...

3. Conversation with the artist, 1 sept. 2025.

4. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, USA, 2005, in the chapter entitled "Animatedness" p. 89-125.

5. Simon Baker, "Bodies, Themes and Variations (in three parts...)", in *Femme Actuelle*, *op. cit.*

6. In the introduction to *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed argues that "feelings do not reside in subjects and objects, but are produced as effects of circulation." She is interested in how feelings shape the "surfaces" of individual and collective bodies, emphasizing that they are produced by social and cultural circulation rather than by isolated states or objects. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Routledge Press, London, 2004.

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