

Press Release

Paul Gondry
VALIS¹

42, rue Quincampoix

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VALISMarch 14
May 16, 2026

Spectral presences drifting across colourful clouds, dramatic tension focused on gestures and objects, atmospheres sculpted by supernatural lights—Paul Gondry’s artworks hone their appearances to tease the viewer’s imagination, inviting them to decipher the signs beneath the surface. From these paintings, there emanates a dense mystery as well as the calculated concision of a storyboard, organising the characters, placing them on the stage and setting up the steps in the ritual. Is this based on experience? Is it a representation? Or is it a completely fabricated dream?

44, rue Quincampoix

Moffat Takadiwa
The Crown!March 14
May 16, 2026

Despite having studied cinema, animation and video, Paul Gondry always comes back to graphic arts. A question that haunts every film-maker’s painting is: what is the need for leaving the moving image to one side, at least temporarily, for paint? Why prefer painting—the art of the fixed image, made of poor material and which has hardly changed over centuries—to the art of modernity that is film, with the continuity of its twenty-four images per second, sound, light and movement? Not that cinema surpasses painting, but when you make, as Paul Gondry does, clips, short films or video games such as role-playing games, what *more* can painting offer?

The answer is in the medium’s very nature, its artificiality being the best means of translating the visions the artist seeks to display. Painting is a must when suggestion takes precedence over narration, apparitions over incarnations, fantasy over reality. Paul Gondry’s painting is not merely about set images. Rich in details, textures and lights, it installs an atmosphere and retains a specific, haunted moment. It precipitates, focuses and emblematises. More than a picture, it is about seeking the “image’s feeling,” says the painter.

The artist likes to describe his painting as a receptacle, a tomb, a manuscript. It is the opposite of film, its residual shimmering, what survives once the screen and the light have been turned off. His painting plunges all the deeper into darkness and formlessness, from which springs the unknown, even the monstrous. His drawings search through the depths of the human psyche, examining its fantasies, illusions and dreams. It brings out images shaped by the universal unconscious, on the edge of fantasy and nightmare. Shadows, silhouettes and profiles cross the frame, as if returning from the depths and margins: they portray ghosts, elderly children, hieratic magicians or celebrants of a nocturnal ritual. This dark, almost sticky, universe is reminiscent of some of F. W. Murnau’s visions or scenes from *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) by Pier Paolo Pasolini. This world is also very Lynchian in its atmospheres and intrigues, flirting with *Eraserhead* (1977) or *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992).

All painting, at least when informed, also incessantly crosses the infinite territories of art history and the works of the past. In Paul Gondry’s painting, such dialogues can be perceived, changing from one canvas to the next: we recognise the Nabis in some of the colour arrangements, Edvard Munch in the distorted figures, and the Surrealist painters in the chimerical visions encased in a symbolic system. Watching films by Paul Gondry, connections can also be made with the contemporary artists Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy.

His pictorial practice, which he started aged twelve, extending to comics and

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graphic novels, developed like an obvious path, a natural inclination. Today, this fully embraced painterly practice follows a set process: it often begins with flat areas of colour on a linen canvas in order to master the texture, then it gradually lets the drawing emerge through numerous layers of paint. Some series are based on a collage of various photographic material, reworked beyond recognition. Painting, carried out in the domestic space, surrounded by personal objects, is a solitary activity that fosters an intimate relationship with the medium: time stands still, it is “mummified,” and a personal feeling is extracted out of it.

Metamorphosis is a crucial motif in this painting: the transformation of bodies and nature, transmutation of matter, slow fading towards death. The colours contribute to this feeling. To quote Edward James about Leonora Carrington, it is as if they “have materialised in a cauldron at the stroke of midnight.” At the bottom of his alchemical crucible, Paul Gondry constructs his palette with bold, acidic montages, at the risk of dissonance: cooked and re-cooked reds, the colour of dried blood, sooty blacks, but also the somewhat supernatural light blues and greens of the aurora borealis. Colour does not describe the object; it projects the symbolic qualities and contributes to the internal balance of the composition. By so doing, Paul Gondry leans towards Symbolism, but of an esoteric kind. The picture is deciphered like a secret grimoire. Midnight suns and Van Gogh-styled starry nights make up the sky in Paul Gondry’s scenes, which are impossible to place— day interior? night exterior? The whole thing is theatrically set up, lit up by artificial lights.

Unlike cinema, where images follow each other, painting can combine several pictures in one, becoming a fixed panorama where characters and new stories coexist, like many threads towards possible narratives. Some of Paul Gondry’s compositions are reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch’s kaleidoscopic paintings, which must be explored slowly to be understood.

In some places, a wealth of details evoke the Orientalists’ ornamental trend, as in Gustave Moreau’s works: wrought-iron gates and other minutely worked, but never common, motifs. Paul Gondry transports his subjects into fictional spaces out of time. The pictures are inhabited by masked creatures, either naked or dressed with large togas. An elongated presence in the water inevitably brings to mind the iconography of Ophelia and the Pre-Raphaelites. The pictorial treatment varies depending on the area: passages with myriad details are juxtaposed with more abstract backgrounds, which provide projection surfaces for the viewer. Figures emerge from this substance as if on the screen of a silent film, undergoing transformations, in states of limbo.

The name of the artist-run space Paul Gondry has co-founded in New York, 15 Orient, reveals his taste for esotericism, which he shares with the Surrealists and Leonora Carrington. Some titles—such as *Nigredo*, an alchemical term referring to the phase of putrefaction, calcination and decomposition, the first step towards the philosopher’s stone—leave room for doubt as to his possible initiation. The artworks themselves also maintain ambiguity and resist any unequivocal interpretation. They have tipped over into the occult, where secrecy is the order of the day and words are superfluous.

Laetitia Chauvin

1. *VALIS*, an acronym for Vast Active Living Intelligence System, is the title of a novel by Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) published in 1978, and the first book in the *VALIS Trilogy*. The author develops the concept of *VALIS* around a satellite that has become terrestrial and uses a “pink laser beam,” a sort of “disinhibiting stimuli,” to transfer information and project holograms on Earth in order to help communication between an extraterrestrial species and humanity. Philip K. Dick said he had been in a trance with *VALIS*, when he suspected, despite the lack of symptoms, a deadly disease in his child, or when he started to speak in a foreign language he had never learnt.