

Press Release

May 17
June 21, 2025Opening
Saturday, May 17
from 11am to 8 pm

Le Bouquet Manquant

Pieter Jennes

Semiose is delighted to present the first exhibition in France of the Flemish artist Pieter Jennes. His works combine the use of oils and collage and stand out due to their vivid colors, intricate details and singular narrative qualities. Classic themes such as the depiction of people, animals and nature are treated in a way that is both touching and expressive, exploring the full range of human emotions.

Laetitia Chauvin: *Why did you choose this particular title for the exhibition?*
Pieter Jennes: I decided on the name "Le Bouquet Manquant" [The Missing Bouquet] as it is also the title of the main work in the show. The painting *Le Bouquet Manquant* shows a boy, surrounded by dogs, who is collecting flowers and is distracted at the sight a butterfly. The title concerns those moments in a relationship when there are unspoken expectations that we either fulfil or not. The works in the exhibition are about love in its broadest sense, but in particular about the various stages of a romantic relationship.

LC: *Even in the painting II Me Tarde?*

PJ: This painting shows a boy walking his dog in the forest. In the background, as in the collage of the pregnant girl (*Le Bouquet Manquant A*) there are a number of figures hiding behind trees and many of the trees have romantic messages carved into their trunks. The little blue house is not a birdhouse but rather a small tree chapel. In bygone times, a tree was often planted at a crossroads and given special meaning by hanging a tree chapel in it. Trees have been objects of worship for millennia, and in the eyes of prehistoric men there was no better symbol of the divine life force than the mighty tree. Many cultures tell stories of the tree of life or the world tree that connects heaven, earth and the underworld. It's often be the oak or the linden tree that carry this special meaning.

LC: *In Untitled, there's more a question of physical love...*

PJ: Indeed, a diminutive rooster is doing his utmost to pleasure the hen. Expressions of physical love like cuddling, kissing and fondling are important.

LC: *Whereas in Each Person, there's a more melancholic side.*

PJ: Sure, there's a feeling of longing or missing or thinking about someone... In this painting, the boy is looking out of the window, lost in thought. He's clearly somewhere else in his mind but in my opinion, he's not sad, he even manages a little smile. On the wall in the background, there are several colored drawings of romantic scenes. If someone can occupy our thoughts to this extent, our love must be real.

LC: *And what about The Bird?*

PJ: I used to paint a lot of birds in the past. I grew up next to a forest and my father is a bird watcher. Like the collage of the painter, the bird is a silent witness. Although the expression is no longer commonly used, 'a bird' is also a reference to an attractive woman.

LC: *In fact, there are birds in almost all your works!*

PJ: This not at all deliberate. I've also used a lot of falling people or animals as subjects for my drawings and paintings. This stems from my fascination for the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader (1942-1975) who frequently explores the

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effects of gravity or falling in his small yet powerful oeuvre. Perhaps birds symbolize the opposite of this through their ability to defy gravity.

LC: *Your works are full of tiny details, such as flowers, apple cores, leaves, butterflies and dragonflies etc. There are even miniscule trees in the landscapes. You seem to play on different scales in building compositions in which natural elements play a predominant role.*

PJ: I grew up in the countryside, then for a while lived in the city, and have now moved back to the country. The works I'm currently showing are set in late summer or early autumn, a period when nature is highly active. Insects know they are living their final moments and try to squeeze as much as they can out of their remaining lives. Animals build up stocks or put on layers of fat for the winter. Birds begin to migrate. Due to the fermentation of rotting fruit, it's not unusual to find inebriated animals in the forest... In short, life is buzzing!

LC: *The exhibition also features two collages that seem to make up a diptych. One of them shows a painter at his easel, in front of a blank canvas. The other is of a woman in the woods. Is the painter a self-portrait?*

PJ: It's more an archetypal image, but one that expresses everything I stand for. The second collage features a pregnant woman walking in the forest with several men hiding behind the trees. When my girlfriend was pregnant, I was fascinated by the changes in her body as it became balloon shaped and a lot of fun to draw and paint using big circular objects as models.

LC: *Your characters are incorporated in a rather curious way in your landscapes, as if they were set decors, almost like in a theatre.*

PJ: I have a great affection for medieval illuminated miniatures, which, despite their realism, often feel orchestrated like stage or theater sets. Perspective, while certainly present, is a minor aspect of the image as a whole. When I was an art student, I gained access to various heritage libraries to browse these medieval books and examine these miniatures in close up, without protective glass. In my particular case, I need reality to be able to create a painting, but the painting doesn't need to reflect this reality.

LC: *You sometimes staple sections of your collages, which is a technique we rarely see.*

PJ: When I started doing collages, I just used glue but I was afraid certain pieces would come loose after a certain time, so I decided to staple them really solidly. As time went by, I started to embrace the staples because they gave more punch to the collages and I like their aggressiveness which formed a nice contrast with the often-gentle subjects.

LC: *One distinctive quality of your works is their particularly matt finish.*

PJ: The matt effect of my paintings is achieved by shading with lightfast solid-color pencils and crayons. I like the fact that my works absorb light which is a completely different experience from our daily interaction with backlit screens.