

Sébastien Gouju

Still a life

From april 9th to may 28th 2016

Opening on saturday april 9th from 11 am to 9 pm

A pink octopus, glistening with life, its tentacles penetrating a shelf covered with blue glass tiles, transforms your bathroom into an epic battle scene worthy of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*: This fragment of a domestic scene remodelled by an unbridled imagination arouses mixed feelings, somewhere between the connivance of a cheeky wink and the real concern at being faced with the sudden and uncontrolled animation of such an ordinarily orderly setting. These are the frontiers within which the works of Sébastien Goujou spring into life: Giverny and Monet's painting prosaically rendered as a lily pond contained within a wash basin, or for lovers of fairy tales, a magic wand, a simple branch picked up from the ground with a starfish embedded at one of its extremities, just as it should be. So many of the associations appear incongruous yet they take shape from the register of the familiar – everyday objects rendered realistically in glazed earthenware or as paintings. The spectator's surprise, and enjoyment, is by no means diminished.

Yet there is more to discover. From the grid formed by the glass tiles to the arabesques drawn by the tentacles of the octopus, almost unnoticed, a veritable history of ornamentation is being written; from the plant growth orchestrated by Art Nouveau to the strict blueprint advocated by Modernist aesthetics. It is as if decorative patterns, following their moral condemnation by Adolf Loos, were once again being liberated, through the same mechanism that gives rise to unseen visions in the hidden details in wallpaper patterns or the lines that form the structure of wood, from which whole forests spring forth in the rubbings of Max Ernst. And even if Sébastien Goujou's universe resounds with echoes of Surrealism, it is no less solidly anchored in the present, a period defined by the fully consummated separation of man from nature and the increasing success of ever-larger DIY stores. Indeed, walking through their aisles, we come across mounds of tiles in the shape of pebbles, imitation grass carpeting, bamboo wallpaper and all kinds of wild animal cushions as well as everything necessary to look after those fragments of vegetation confined within our apartments or at best on the balcony: all of the above, the epitome of artifice and substitution, bear witness to the desire for nature felt by the city-dweller, who lives there in such an entrenched state that he might well be inclined to believe the fable of the peanut tree branch, this ultimate challenge to the laws of botany, yet which is represented here in such a plausible way.

That with which man surrounds himself, the environment he has constructed, in short his living conditions: these are the themes Sébastien Goujou bases his most recent sculptures upon, as well as his latest pictorial experiments associating in the form of collage, representations of different objects, plants and animals, that through juxtaposition form patterns within the compositions, which echoing his sculptures, function as repertoires as well as décor. The artist invites us to imagine hybrids that don't as yet exist and for the benefit of archaeologists from the future, he creates slightly transformed emblems of our present day society. For those interested in rediscovering the history of such commonplace – and voluntarily kitsch – objects as the pitcher of Cotes du Rhone wine (immortalized in the sketches of the Deschiens TV show) or the lucky swallows used to decorate the facades of houses (of the "our nest" type), the artist has provided rich food for thought at the crossroads of everyday life and the world of the fable. Within this world, the flight of swallows no longer ushers in the springtime, in its place we find nightingales flying into walls and remaining embedded there like some cruel gag from Monty Python; here, the containers do not suit their users and as in La Fontaine's fable *The Stork and the Fox*, it's the bird that manages to come out on top. In a similar way, an entire farmyard of creatures poke their heads out of jugs decorated in a more or less intricate fashion: from the rooster, hens and chicks showing their beaks in the necks of standard, flame patterned jugs to the magnificent peacock rearing its head from a beautiful turquoise vase. This world is as much a product of the anthropomorphism of objects (a jug has a neck and a lip...) as it is of the animal kingdom, which since the early era of domestication man has increasingly dominated, yet which always finds a way back, camouflaged in the most insignificant trinkets and everyday articles. "Nature loves to hide" Heraclitus states in one of his fragments. For Sébastien Goujou it's part of the décor.

Guitemie Maldonado