

# VALLOIS

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# GILLES BARBIER

Entre, dans, derrière, sous, sur...  
(Between, inside, behind, under, on...)

11 September – 31 October 2020

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Gilles Barbier's art is simultaneously a word on the tip of the tongue, an idea at the back of the mind, and a chiaroscuro between two intervals of light. There is no "window on the world", a metaphor applied to painting ever since Alberti forgot to close his; with Barbier there is a skylight in a cosmos as singular as it is infinite, a thought that leads to a system, as extraordinary as it is abundant, for re-enchanting the world.

For his 12th solo show at the gallery, Barbier has created a series of drawings, the titles of which start with prepositions - *Between, inside, behind, under, on...* - that are making the (art) world think in every direction.

Born in Vanuatu (Oceania, South Pacific), the artist has always been fascinated by the sand drawings; these drawings take shape while a story is told, and are a form of writing that can be read in any direction. A "preposition" is a word that serves as a tool that syntactically links a word with the one preceding it, in a subordinating relationship. *Position matters*, explains Barbier. *Between, inside, behind, under, on...* These prepositions are all movements Barbier makes around subject matter buried within a complex system; like a wave that churns everything in a ceaseless flow, a maelstrom.

Barbier seems preoccupied by the smooth appearance of the surface layer left by the real upon the surface of the world.

He thus decides to peel it off, to pierce it - like an orange that, once peeled, reveals the dense, complex network of pulp that suddenly explodes under the pressure of an orange squeezer. Except that, with Barbier, there is no orange, but rather a banana - a recurrent one.

This is the notion of the slip, this surprise effect that takes you from below (or maybe behind), and that can upend you in an instant, disrupt your thoughts, bring opposites together, and conceive of the world *Seen from below*.

In any event, the sexual background floats *Between, inside, behind, under, on...*

It is the words hidden behind the artist's thinking that give rise to this *cosa mentale*, this design that ultimately shatters and becomes a drawing.

From design to drawing: a dispossession. Barbier likes the idea of a "mental bin" ready to receive the inexhaustible flood of ideas that insinuates itself into his images.

The artist's "production machines" produce a deluge of material, subject matter without limits that both stimulates and liberates thought.

It is rather like a tangle of cables behind which are sparks - a metaphor for an idea that crops up suddenly, here-and-now, upside-down and back-to-front. These cables are those of artificial intelligence, the AI that is invading the world.

The idea of networks appears everywhere - *Between, inside, behind, under, on...* - in his large compositions: the paper becomes the surface for expressing an exploration beneath the surface of the visible, beneath the skin of things.

The subject matter loses its figurative aspect and frees Barbier's hand: "The page is my playground". He weaves together the essence and meanings of images, extracted from life.

As in *Between the folds (memories)*, language creeps into every stratum of Barbier's work.



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Agate Bortolussi