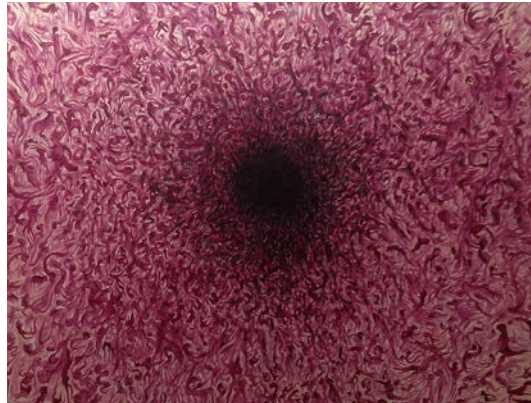


Abrakan (naissance)

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Persian precipice

«Abrakan» is a slippery terrain. First we need to take some precautions if we don't want to be sucked in these great maelstroms whirling towards the deep end of the paintings. We also need to be careful not to get caught in the grand narrative launched by the Peybak duet in this series. The title and subtitle seem to come straight from a never-ending Gothic fantasy with suspension points warning us that we are far from reaching the end. «Somewhere, on the Abrakanian lands, beyond the sky, chaos comes after creation...». The tone is eloquent and audacious: we rarely read such hectic and grandiloquent catchphrases in the art world. We hear them on the television, on TV shows. «Geeks» also like these introductions often found in the video role games they play. Which already says this about Peybak's work: it must be very addictive.

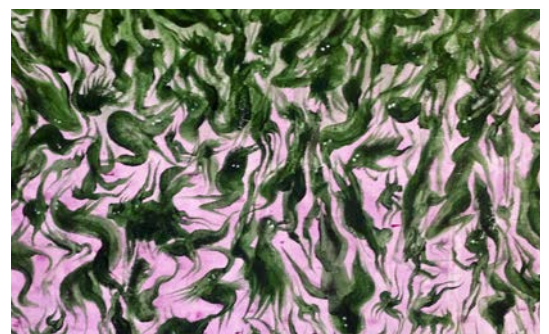
Babak Alebrahim Dehkordi and Peyman Barabadi are two young Iranian artists (both 30 years old), who graduated from an art school in Tehran (where they met in a painting course in 2000), almost unknown in Europe (although their work is currently exhibited in Rheims, in the cellars of the Pommeroy estate). When we ask who feeds into their work, who is their artistic source, they answer that they have been «influenced by Iranian poets, by stories» and add that they do not possess «any reference». Likewise, let us refrain from this temptation, to bring into the picture our own cultural baggage, from which we would take out, for this occasion, the colourful crowds of James Ensor, the picturesque humanity of Jérôme Bosch, or even Claudio Parmiggiani and his crypt marked with red hand prints, which could even push us all the way to Edgar Allan Poe and his «Descent into the Maelström». And in fact it's too late, we are there, we are going right there.

The paintings presented at Galerie Vallois are a stepping stone towards the erection of «Abrakan», an imaginary world in the shape, for the moment, of a boiling pot where a swarm of flexible and shapeless silhouettes

mill about and slowly cook. This melting pot seems to possess a false bottom: we catch a glimpse, in some of the paintings, of a blue sky, at least an opening, onto what? That, we will discover later as the «Abrakan» project is due to grow. The premises have already been set down, not through paintings, but in animated films which were projected in an exhibition space. Tiny creatures were swarming on several screens and today, they show themselves on canvases, on metal plaques, or even on boxes of matches, just as agitated and excitable. What are they? A legitimate question as the two artists take the risk of hanging their work to make it look like a census, or more trivial, a «who's who» organisation chart. Hung one by one, the members of Abrakan saturate the walls of the exhibition space. What's more, the Peybak duet rejoices in the fact that «there is not one similar to another. You cannot find two that are exactly the same, they say.»

But in the paintings, we have to admit that this crowd of creatures forms a whole, a body. They are all clustered in a compact and moving swarm, pulled in luminous swirls. Their work process actually starts with the choice of colour. No strict monochromes, each painting is, nonetheless, limited to a restrictive palette, reddening, dark, blueish, ochre, greenish. These tones are those of the start, or the end, of the day. Once again, within the stories told by the artists, these paintings depict the creation of a world. No need to ponder on the biological appearance of their characters (their sperm look). Rather, we should insist on what is starting to take shape within these forms on the paintings. «Abrakan», of course, but beyond it, it is an image of painting itself, the painting being made. The effervescent homunculi swarming on the paintings are, from far away, nothing else than brush strokes covering the painting, working to animate it, to fill it, to ignite it. «Abrakan» then becomes the terreplein of painting, between «creation» and «chaos». «Abrakan», in the end, is a precipice and a pictorial precipitate.

Judicaël Lavrador



29 May

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