

## Texts

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Marion Zilio - Para Bellum // 2018

Valérie Michel-Fauré - Corporeality and Resilience // 2016

Jean-Louis Poitevin - A col perdu // 2016

## Para Bellum<sup>1</sup>

While the word 'motif' carries notions of repetition and decoration, it has the same root as 'motive', with all its combative connotations. The exhibition *Motifs belligérants* manifests this state of unknown, internal conflict; proceeding from the most solid of reasons, it nevertheless operates in secret, contaminating the imagination. Floryan Varennes' work navigates this context of permanent oppositions.

Between seduction and aversion, clinic and torture chamber, the luminous and the obscure, the artist delves into the repertoire of an idealized Medievalism to bring us a collection of political objects or social constructions that permeate the present day. While these perceptions function as far-off reminiscences, they convey positive forces (stamped with symbolism and magic, odes to chivalry or courtly love) much more than negative (echoing barbarism, the Plague, the Crusades or the Insurrection). Because it is presented as radically opposite to Modernity, the Middle Ages functions as a heuristic enabling us to perceive, using set categories, the exaggerated positivism, the illusion of Progress, and the lies and denials of our civilization.

Cutting the space in two with a wall installation, as much a defensive front as a projection screen, Floryan Varennes uses a minimalist, mannered vocabulary to investigate costume and regalia - 'apparat' in French. While 'apparat' derives from apparare (to prepare for), its meanings link to those of ceremony, sheen, decor and ritual, and secondly those of device, prosthesis, instrument and machine. This clothing, both weapon and quotidian battleground, incarnates a battle cry to seize these divides. It prepares the individual, making them worthy of appearing, and aims to construct a uniqueness disciplined by a set of shared norms and values. Playing earnestly with the crafts, in a ritual not unlike that of 'ladies' work', Floryan Varennes works by fragmenting and stratifying meanings. His clothing pieces follow a system of manufactured signs that he skews, accentuating their perverse effects. The bodies have disappeared; all that remains are the relics of their sacrifice.

New contemporary martyrs, the white collars in the work *Dysphoria* have become objects of torture, augmented with thousands of pins, prohibiting any gratification through membership to a class. This ambiguous sentiment is also present in *Hiérophanie*, an assemblage of black collars, embroidered with glass beads, which seems to affirm that the manifestation of the sacred and the profane can be transmitted by filiation. Ancestry is always an extension of these regalia – the clothing, masks or roles by which our ancestors are defined. The stretching in the work *Ex Aequo* could be a tortured and sublimated manifestation of this, a kind of reflection on our genetic heritage. Whereas the series *Hiérarques* polarizes the transversalities of genre: folds of men's jackets have been cut and then fused together, imitating the form of a vulva or a mandorla. Hierarchies are literally invaginated; clothing has now taken on a war-like dimension, with rows of daggers all aiming forward.

While clothing has long been a signifier of class, it is increasingly difficult to identify relationships of power today: sweatpants have now had the haute couture treatment, and the upper classes dress in grunge. With *Equipotence*, the artist shifts our fantasy of the Middle Ages by way of incredible mythological and monstrous forms, which appear to be captured behind beaded bars. The sweatpant has become a monopant, invoking a mermaid who cries a warning about all the reversibilities between the real and the imaginary, man and woman, ornament and armour, and high and low culture.

Just as clothing extends the body and identity, extensions are used in architecture to give 'character'; examples are ensigns *OST* and *PARADE* or arrow slits, which appear to be the ancestor of the Panopticon, the prison system imagined by Jeremy Bentham. 'To see without being seen' was the dream of a Modernity that strove to put reality and individuals into boxes, organizing them by category, usage or position. Finally, while the banner of *Ad-Astra* serves to formalize this 'ensign of war' that excludes those who would escape inclusion, above all it is there to rally a community struggling for the same ideals, under the same flag.

The exhibition *Motifs belligérants* takes on the guise of a space for weaponry or torture. Between fabric and fabrication, one can view Floryan Varennes' work as the vestiges of contemporary relics, imbued with the timeless tales of warriors. These works become motifs for troubles to be overcome, defeated or borne, whose ex-votos embody a ceremonial vow – ornament and armament.

Marion Zilio  
Avril 2018 / *Motifs Belligérants*, Fernand Léger Art Center.

<sup>1</sup> "Prepare for war," from the phrase, Si vis pacem, para bellum (If you want peace, prepare for war).

## Corporeality and Resilience // Extract.

Floryan Varennes tells through his works a *Madgic* story in the vein of the books written by the esoterist archimage of the Renaissance Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. This humanist, philosopher and alchemist with universal skills asserted his feminist views through the link between microcosm and macrocosm, disregarding male and female archetypes. Memories, intuitions and emotions echo in the tangible reality of his creations, thus transforming spirit into matter. He develops hic and nunc, according to Paracelsus' research, a plastic vocabulary to embody this metamorphosis, an alchemical thought merging body and soul. His *Imago* thus represents the gold of this creative process which makes a palimpsest of the concept of corporeality through his works such as *Alternance*, *Inversus* or *Ab-praesentia*. A body experienced: between story and remembrances. A body unique: between myths and personal mythology. A body diverse: at the same time singular and universal. A body hybrid: either dual or chimerical. A body missing: spectre or aura. A body present: fragment and skin.

Sculptures, devices or installations are the result of a monastic work: the plastic reconstruction of a body, metamorphosis by way of seams and sutures. The visual systems he uses abolish the dissonances between reality and imaginary. They disturb our perspective and perception of the devices shown: in *Alternance*, this 8-piece sculpture hung against a wall and composed of two fused sleeves fluctuating between finery and *ex-voto*, flayed skin and fragmented set-up, fragility and firmness. These arms embrace no more; they become spineless and throw themselves at a wall to show themselves openly.

Through a phenomenon of fascination, of contradictory feelings of attraction and repulsion, the watcher finds himself/herself between reminiscence and resilience. As proof, in the installation *Ab-praesentia*, coat-hangers faithfully recreated and placed like a spatial drawing, or the stretching of these two centimetres between base and hook, deliver a translation of aesthetic refinement and unreality. The watcher feels and revives historical and mystical representations while projecting back his/her own traumas through an act of translation. Another mirage appears in his work, one of perpetual tension between absence and presence, life and death, a perpetual macabre dance. This concept of transcending objects of everyday life is also applied to the world of second skin and finery, all those fragments an evocation of the transience of life, of bodily annihilation and of vanity. We are reflected then on the works of Floryan as in a formal mirror, meta-spiritual of the silent and immobile life of the objects he chooses. They are thus the trace of our relationship with matter, of our beliefs, our archetypes and our everyday life.

Manifesto for a new genre, for a radicant individuality, Floryan, a young visual artist, places himself in the context of alter-modernity: a present translation phenomenon of a revisited Baudelairian modernity and of a globalization defined by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *The Radicant*. This return to modernity opposes itself in its dynamic to post-modernism, itself based on the question of origin: Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going? It reverses the questioning and replaces it in the context of our contemporary society. *Inversus* illustrates a hybridisation where unity becomes double. Two collars are shown upside-down together on a frame. The spineless and translucent piece lets itself be suspended in its centre where the collars face each other while fading. Reunification, fusion, and tension are at the heart of this project where otherness is king. It thus questions the notion of gender in a different and differed societal reinterpretation of homosexuality.

He deconstructs the concept of patriarchy and of hierarchy between genders through his symbols, his icons, heteronormative and apotropaic signs and representations. He suggests the reconstruction of a transfigured corporeality, free of all suffering, of all constraint in an act of resilience and his gestures accompany him between minimalism and mannerism.

VALERIE MICHEL-FAURE  
Novembre 2016 / Exhibition - Tombe, Espace Van Gogh 2016.

A Col Perdu // Extract.

Inhabited by visions in black and white that he presents as singular objects, paradoxical installations, clothing, devices and drawings, the works of Floryan Varennes speak, with propriety, of the violence inflicted on the body throughout history.

Everyone has a body, and each body is this singular mix of head and legs, covered in clothes, the shirt and jacket being today's male emblem. Starting from this background of clothes and textiles used in the medical world - a world which speaks his mother's language - Floryan Varennes deploys a universe in which fantasies are reduced to their simplest form.

Here, the apparent banality of objects is completely transformed by their processing. He enlarges them, multiplies them, stretches them, adds pearls, trim or pins, each time to link them to the edge of the dream. The soft and relentless violence of the social game - the usual constraints of these everyday situations through which ancient rites are still visible - are the real subject of his work.

There is a connection between the collar and missing head: the gesture of decapitation. This staging evokes the separation of the head from the rest of the body as an acerbic look at the role of jewelry at the heart of fashion. Donning a collar is to accept the separation between master and slave, between those in power and their subjects. It is also touching what gender theory teaches us about imperceptible forms of oppression.

Inspired by legends, the history of the Middle Ages, gender studies and lectures on Occidental symbolism, Floryan Varennes progresses on the arduous path towards meaning through his work, advancing with eternal slowness. Nothing, in fact, says what it really means, neither in words nor objects, situations or symbols. It is only through the multiplicity of references both explicit and implicit, individual and cultural, that light can be created through a work, that violent light that in others' mind is a sort of revelation.

The symbol, the collar's circle for instance, evokes not only the neck, head and death, but it stages both literally and metaphorically the existence of a halo around the absent head, a nimbus, a divine presence in the body's vicinity. We understand then that these collars are not expressing masculinity against femininity, but the belonging of both in the "soleil Cou Coupé" in Apollinaire's magic expression.

The elegance of his work - of his large drawings, which for him signify nothing, but nonetheless evoke infinity and the gap made by the sun in the unreachable sky, or archetypal geometric shapes, but first and foremost the structure of the brain itself inhabiting our head like a prisoner in his jail - develops itself like a bridge spanning the centuries. In it come together the ever repeating practices of the amanuensis and sirens of fashion, the world of symbols and styles. Between individual mythology, cultural references and ontological pursuit, Floryan Varennes declines the adornment as the hereafter of our fears and grants his nearly apocalyptic visions a endemic character.

Jean Louis Poitevin  
TK-21- La, Revue N°57 April 2016