

MENTIRAS #14 - AM

J

I got to know your work through the IRN zines. Since then, I followed most of its occurrences, publications and exhibitions. In a recent article, you mention what you were doing before making zines: you spent a short time in Art School and painted some sets for rave parties. The whole thing draws a singular map. Could you give me some details?

A

My first artistic emotions came through printed pictures, books. Even if my family wasn't alien to the concept of museum visits, it is with books that I felt my interest in art through books I got interested in art. At home, when I was fifteen, impressionists' catalogues were mixed with surfing or skating magazines. I discovered the fanzine format at seventeen or so, with some schoolmates showing me publications related to industrial subculture, and bands like TG, Laibach, Whitehouse and others. These rare prints were displaying a gloomy imagery which was fascinating. I was already drawing a lot, channeling heterogeneous influences, mixing humor and darkness. Already in a duo, probably because I was needing an amused distance from my own work, something possible when someone else is involved. But back then, we were very few to share a taste for these pictures, so the idea of making and distributing zines was unthinkable in my small town.

Then came my years in Rennes, where I met Julien Carreyn. I was mostly painting. It's true that I was also filling notebooks with drawings, but these were mostly sketches. They were not supposed to be shown, nor published in zines.

The whole thing came later, in Paris, at the very end of the nineties. The impulse was collective, from a larger group sharing my tastes and producing zines. Discovering the *Un Regard Moderne* bookshop obviously came as a shock: a place where everything addresses you personally and goes beyond your expectations. So at this time, and with Julien's help, I published my first zines. I didn't published much, by the way (I have always been a bit slow), but my zines allowed me to meet and gradually get to work with Prigent, Hegray, and a whole tiny group. In 2005, I published two offset books: *Fontab*, with drawings by Julien and *Vinius*, with my own drawings. To be honest, showing drawings in art galleries was a natural evolution. I didn't really belong to a specific group: I was not « pro », nor « anti » gallery. This uneasy position is actually still mine today. I did a couple of shows much earlier, in La Roche-sur-Yon, and in

Angers, and then I had my works on the walls of *Un Regard Moderne*, and at *CNEAI* in Chatou, which was the first institution to look at our zines. Also, to speak frankly, I got slightly bored of zines and I felt the need to push my work further, to avoid having it locked in a register too easily identifiable, so I abandoned this sort of selfpublication (for a while).

J

But a show at *Un Regard Moderne* doesn't require the same mindset as one at *Crèvecoeur*. As you say yourself, *Un Regard Moderne* relates to a sense of community of interests and affects. A contemporary art gallery follows a different logic, maybe more centered on efficiency. Didn't you feel that you had to adjust, rationalize, your own work or your own position, when you went from the first to the second?

A

To have a show in a place where I feel at home, or in a place more remote from my usual context doesn't change much. Showing your work is inherently violent and demanding, so I need to rationalize anyway.

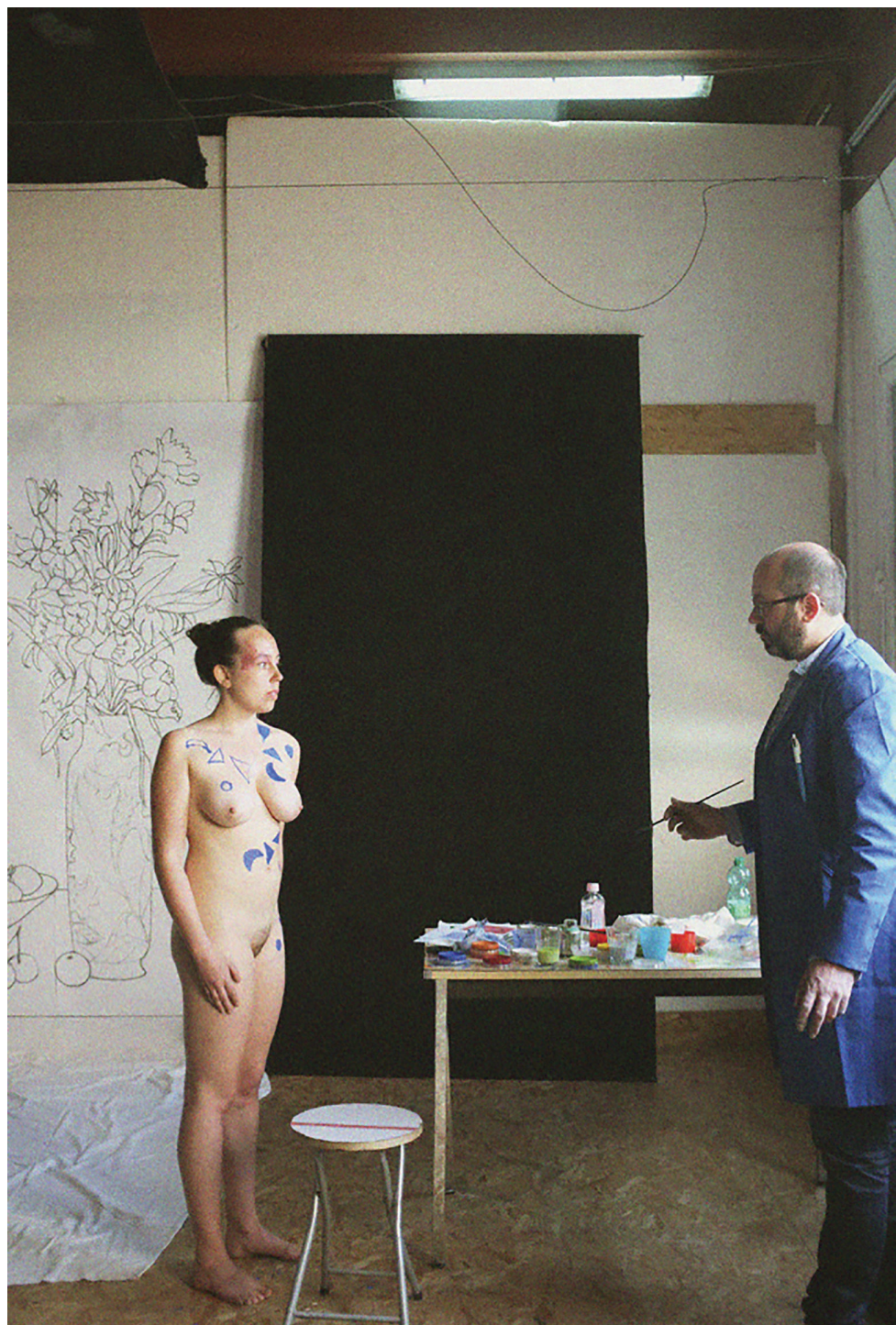
I could say that releasing a very limited selfpublished zine bring the same fears as releasing a book of a thousand copies. Probably because deep down I don't know who I want to talk to. And of course, this is an identity question that I find interesting.

That being said, art dealers are taking part in a business, which is a process I understand, but find annoying nonetheless. And that brings constraints I don't find stimulating.

Some would probably blame me for my silly jokes, whereas others think I'm too discreet. But I do not adjust my work to where I show it, whether it be in a bookshop I love or in a contemporary art gallery with less affective investments. These might be different worlds, and the changes in my work could make people think I'm adjusting them to these worlds, but I always feel an inner need to refresh my work, to transform it, no matter the context.

I see questions related to the art world as secondary. The first question for me like for many other artists, is about creating a universe – here, a visual one – as singular as possible, autonomous, rich, complex and coherent (where in my case, Franck Margerin paints like Giorgio Morandi, or Paul Delvaux makes a Philip Guston). To have this combination and make it function as a whole, and for myself, is already so difficult that issues related to galleries should stay as external as possible.





Actually, it is more my work as a drawing teacher for kids or teenagers that makes me cautious about showing my work very openly. Because it could offend a large audience. So that, yes, would be an actual issue.

J

A couple of years ago already, after several solo shows, and also after you quit your job as a graphic designer, I heard that you had a new job, as cellarman in a restaurant. What motivated this choice? Was it about taking a break from art making?

A

After the group show at the Fondation Ricard in 2007, I wanted to spend more time making art, so I left my graphic design job. I did teach a bit at the time. I also sort of wandered, artistically speaking, starting several new sets of drawings and paintings, looking for an evolution. Some were good, some were not! Those years I was a bit stuck in search of new technical ways, but I keep a couple of series I still find interesting. I became cellarman by chance, and because I needed some money. The job was very funny and social, and it gave me some time to draw between customers. It did not really impede my work as an artist, because sailing into the « real world » actually brings me some ideas. It took me some time to realize that what I do as an artist is quite middle class, and needs to fit into the small and simple daily life.

J

You mentioned your fear of confining yourself to a narrow artistic identity, for example when you stopped making zines. Is this a way for you to keep an intense interest in the work or is it about how others perceive what you do?

A

It is true that I easily get bored when I use a repetitive formula. I enjoy experimenting with the visual elements a lot, swapping tools, materials and gestures. But I should be cautious because this can result in a sort of scattering. I always have to find a balance, for example between drawing and painting, or between the various levels of realism I bring to my pictures.

There is also a very pragmatic dimension in this push towards technical changes. For instance, at one point, framing my pictures became an

issue. Questions related to framing are very complex, fascinating but also quite heavy. I am not even talking about production costs, which are another important issue, of course. Having to use many frames became suffocating after a while, which is why I wanted to change the materials, and to use unframed canvases. Besides, when I succeed in making a painting or a drawing on a canvas, the object always seems like it reached a sort of perfection, in its simplicity and autonomy. That is true until another series appears, that responds to the previous one, and that one can not be shown without frames...

Anyway, I didn't see myself going further on this path of dry line drawings. I needed to get back to painting, from both a sensual need and a desire to deal with its intellectual implications. Painters like Leon Spilliaert, Felix Vallotton, Frank Frazetta, John Currin or Lisa Yuskavage were fascinating to me, with the fuzzy suave quality of their art. So, gradually, I wanted to search in that direction.

About trying to imagine what perception one can have of what I do: frankly, if twelve people that I trust (and that includes you) can enjoy my work, that is mostly enough, because they have a demanding eye. As I said before, beyond them, I don't know who I am talking to, it is pretty vague, abstract and conflicting.

J

You just passed the CAPES [a French diploma which allows you to teach], so you will have to give classes. On a very basic level, how will you organize your schedule?

A

Drawing or painting go before anything else in my schedule. I do one or the other daily and regularly. I draw almost every day, more or less intensively. Then come the money issues, which have to be fixed. But I have to say: I enjoy teaching. I spent a lot of time learning different techniques in drawing and painting, in order to enjoy the most freedom, autonomy and variety of expressions, and this is something I like to teach. But to find the proper amount of time to work on my own drawings, while keeping a degree of independence from the art market, will always be tense.

Now that I have this system of series, which are responding to each other, I can pull different strings, one after the other. It is bliss to go back to one series and to complete it. It works like a small pictorial

“capital” that I can manipulate. Each series is an element or a character in a larger story. This way of working in series is also a way to organize all my different inspirations.

J

Talking about inspiration brings me to the topic of your artist status. You seem to embrace some tropes linked to a traditional characterization of the artist: looking for “beauty” or “truth”, expressing an inner vibration. But this approach contradicts the pictures you create, absurd, sometimes violent or harsh, or your methods: formal variations, iconographic recycling and mise en abyme. Is your position as an artist a part of your artistic work? Is there a conscious strategy here?

A

The quest for “beauty” is not something I care about at all, to be honest. I would not know what to say about it. It is a question that paralyzes. Except if you introduce this idea to the academic canon, the artist can’t say what “beauty” is. No, what I am looking for is the “right”, not in the sense of justice, but in the sense of correctness: the adequacy between a theme and its depiction, while keeping a distance, a strangeness. Like being a narrator both present and absent, in the middle of the story, a narrator who sees everything but doesn’t understand anything.

Like many, I am interested in the codes of representation, but also in their displacement, their ambiguous and secret slidings. My universe is both the old France and the project housings, so I try to handle that. That is probably why I am so much invested in questions of rightness and point of view.

I did a lot of diverging, conflicting pictures. Now I try to make them converge again, to have the whole thing breathe a bit. This way of evolving through very different grammars of drawing was, for the most part, planned for a while, in a way strategically, yes, even though I am far from being in full control!

J

What I was trying to address in the previous question is the position you adopt as an artist in different contexts. You bear a flag of “sincerity” but your work shares the gallery space with some postmodern pieces. What do you think of your position in this contemporary art context? And on the other hand, of your position in a self-publishing context?

A

It is true that for a while I was obsessed with the notion of “sincerity”, and how it was connected, once again to the idea of a painting’s, or a drawing’s rightness. For instance, how to reproduce a teenager’s mode of expression, or one that gives way to a teenager’s feelings? How can I work with this, while being both immersed in it and out of it?

Regarding our era and the art world, my enthusiasm for drawing matches a contemporary time period which is very post conceptual, a bit cold and missing life for me.

It is also true that I am less interested in sarcasm. I don’t oppose it but it can lead to big problems, when it is in collusion with the viewer, or on the contrary when it is part of an overlooking position, which is annoying.

I don’t know if it’s a good thing, but I am part of this generation who wanted to promote drawing. And we were quite many: drawing is currently well valued, it even became mundane. Today, contemporary art is very formal and visual, which I think is alright. Maybe things will become more political again, because people get bored of the formal exercise, I don’t know.

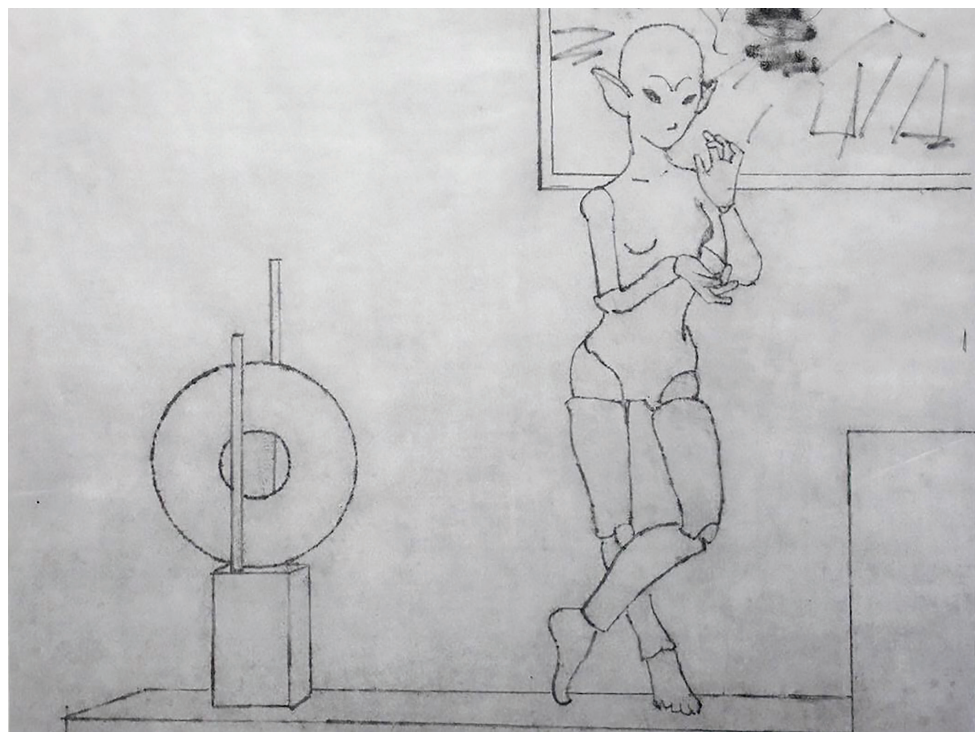
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One of the things I find intriguing about you is how you progress. There seems to be a time for experimentation, when you conduct personal and intuitive research, then a step back and a removal, a way to adopt an inverted position, one outside of any label, of any confined or rigid definition. You also talked, a bit earlier, about having several series going on at the same time, so you can avoid a linear trajectory.

Pragmatically, how do you do that? Do you define a series while working on it (with a topic, a method, a format) or does everything follow a script that you planned beforehand? In the same line of thought, do you have an idea of the context of your work from the start?

A

It is easy to separate four periods in my trajectory. The first one is from fourteen to twenty-four years old. I produced a sort of clumsy figurative painting, which called on influences from François Boisrond to Sigmar Polke. Then, after a long period of uncertainty, I decided to go back to a fundamental and pure form of art: ball pen drawings on A4 paper sheets. This rudimentary process allowed me to produce my first zines on a black





and white photocopier. This is the way I worked from approximately twenty-five to thirty. Then I started to slowly feel the need for a more sensual dimension, related to the materials, to transparencies, to the shaping of figures. But I also looked for a better mastering of the drawing craft, in the sense of a realism pushed further, especially with feminine characters, pushed to the point of photorealism. During this period, the use of color was very scarce. That led to multiple formal directions, and lasted about eight years. Finally, the current period started when I was thirty-nine, and now I feel that I can go back in time and develop some older series that I still find interesting, to make the whole system turn towards the center.

In my work's methodology, there are two different phases of production, one following the other. First, this exploration which is spontaneous, primitive, looking for new forms and unexpected effects of the material. This is when I make an intuitive and adventurous jump into the unknown, a cloud of renewals and raw discoveries, where I progress blindly and playfully. Then comes a time for organizing, rationalizing, controlling – while trying to avoid too much seriousness, too much self-conscience. To go from an initial idea to its final realization can take a lot of time. And my work on distinctive series leads me to develop new grammars for each occurrence, or at least specific techniques, adapted to each situation.

For instance, I am currently in a residency in the Meuse department at the Vent des Forêts art center, and I would like to work on the landscapes of this area of a France that we have slightly forgotten, a bit abandoned. The landscapes are without any singular quality, lacking any strong character, but very seductive precisely because of that. While the Southern France landscapes don't impress me, these ones have a charm, playing both on familiarity and strangeness. For a while, I circled around the right way to work on these: should I start from some photographs I took? Or to make the work directly on location, which would surely be funnier? Painting or drawing? With which colors? I was also influenced by Paul Nash's works, that I discovered at the time. So I tried several approaches, with different techniques, materials and formats, during a few months, with many failures, or semi-failures. It needed some time so I could take a step back while also continuing with other long term series, or ones which were needed for an upcoming show. I finally found a satisfying formula for the landscapes. I already made several, and now the process is indeed scripted, so I will reserve

a couple of weeks in the coming months so I can make approximately thirty in total. That is: if no other series, stronger or more meaningful, changes my schedule or my plans. But I know that I have to make these landscapes, and it will be a very pleasant time.

J

I come back to the IRN zines. For these publications, you worked with Julien Carreyn, and others, many times. Are you specifically looking for a duo's or a group's dynamic?

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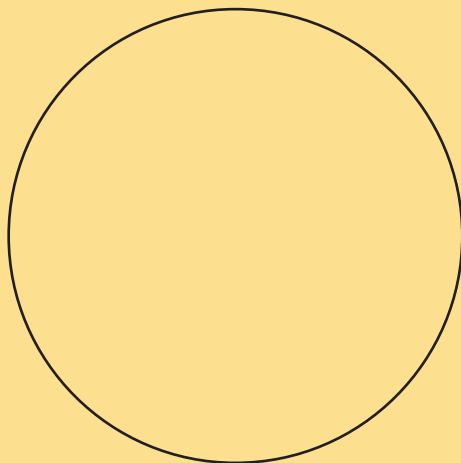
Julien is a valuable partner, someone I can have an artistic back-and-forth with, exchange common tastes and defend them. As I said earlier, there is a time in my work for a step back, for a critical approach, and the rich dialogue with Julien Carreyn favors this moment. He doesn't lack imagination and he is able to inject many ideas, new fields of exploration, new topics or new problematics. So he can step in at any time in my working process, there is no rule. Our works can sometimes converge, and other times diverge, depending on the period.

It is true that I enjoy sharing ideas related to work. That probably stems from a lack of self confidence, but also from my friendly mindset. Also, artistic work obviously comes with a lot loneliness, and I think it is healthy to get out of it on a regular basis. Indeed, its weight can be heavy, and it might be counter-productive, or even deadly, to stay on a lonely path.

On top of that, I am always looking for an anonymous effect. I try to produce a sort of 'lost picture', wandering, indeterminate. So in this tainted relationship that I have with the drawing (the pictorial drawing, the photographic drawing, the teenager's drawing, the « big feet and big nose » genre, the neo-classical drawing, etc.), and keeping in mind that sought-after effect of anonymity, I definitely need the company of other artists. The collaborative dynamic is required to deal with this complex dialectic of doubts and affirmation. Since my work is heavily related to questions of identity, it seems only logical that I can't stay lonely for too long.

MENTIRAS (2014-)

#1	HP	2014	#14	AM	2020
#2	HH	2014	#15	AB	2021
#5	RS	2017			
#6	JW	2018			
#7	OV	2017			
#8	P*S	2017			
#9	AB	2017		cancelled	
#10	LS	2018	#4	IT	
#11	JH	2019	#?	JC	
#13	PB	2020	#12	CF	



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