

P R E S Q U E a solo show by Thomas Wattebled

January 24th - February 22nd 2020

With the support to the galleries / exhibitions from the  French National Center for Plastic Arts.

— « Reality is a false trompe l'oeil » —

In a world in which performance is the main goal and one has to be oneself or have only number tens in one's team, Thomas Wattebled takes hold of the representational symbols of champions, winners and conquerors, and diverts them, in order to pay tribute to the "looser." His work does not pretend to be political, although it approaches the contemporary issues of our western societies linked to the diktats of success, output, efficiency and results through the prism of competition – and pushes them towards "counter-performance."

Each idea starts off as a spontaneous, subtle, humoristic drawing, before it is discreetly pinned in the studio. A series of drawings thanks to which the artist transcends his goal through the challenge of their realization, giving them shape with his gestures and action.

All the way. A simple idea becomes possible in a powerful gesture.

As a result of this effort, candour and naiveté are left behind. An escape route in order to go astray, to lead us astray.

In between poetry, "A L M O S T" poetry.
Almost nothing. Almost normal. Almost perfect,
Almost funny. Almost unsuccessful. Almost Ideal.

Idéal like these sculpted bodies pumping iron that inspired Thomas to create the "Megamasses," composed of weights and protein. Glutamine, Creatine and Taurine are the stratagems used by the sculptor of his own body, in the same way that lightweight concrete allows the sculptor to "blow up" a form. These organic, voluminous modules would like to make us believe in the existence of a dense, crushing mass as a tribute to the athletic, muscular bodies of Antiquity. In vain. However, their lightweight aspect does not reduce their value. On the contrary. They become the iron of an artist, he who sculpts them, carries them, seeking perfect form.

Ridiculous romanticism.
The perfect body. The glorious body.
Romanticism of distress.

The sadness of roundabouts, which have become the symbol of contestation and rallying points for those whose heart is set on revolt, appealed to Thomas even before French protestors had taken hold of them, to abandon them later on. In 2015, the artist began a series of performances of which only photographs remain: Les Échoués (*Those Aground*). The titled referred to the hundreds of abandoned fishing boats deposited alone in the middle of certain roundabouts in Brittany, supposedly representative of the cultural heritage of a region attached to the history of navigation, once out-dated and useless, unfit for navigation, and whose destruction would be too expensive. Faced with the paradox of these out-dated, useless vessels disguised as heroes, the artist decided to index them and to majestically shine hazard lights, used by sailors in the event of tragedy and skippers in the event of victory, on them: "The same object, same gestures, same passionate red light connects victory and distress."

Poetry and Nonsense.
Melancholic comic.

Chagrin (Grief) is the name given to a zinc fountain made by Thomas from which only the sound of running water can be heard, and whose preliminary drawing displays the serene face of a man imprisoned in this structure, as if he were soothed by the lapping sound. The same sound draws you towards the sculpture like the song of mermaids. Once you're there, after following your ears, you come across the sparkling sculpture: an iron lady sitting enthroned, alone in the dark, theatrically, offering the sight of a caged bird. The beauty of this sculpture resides in the invisible and the inaudible, in imagination and its non-satisfaction.

Reality is a false trompe-l'oeil.
It comes so close, that it is almost equivalent to it.

Aurélie Faure
Translated by Emmelene Landon