

## WHISPER OF THE WINDOWS

From 6 November to 17 December 2022, Michèle Schoonjans Gallery is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition dedicated to the work of the young Belgian artist Laurent Dumortier (b.1989, Namur (B)).

### The obscure clarity of an unveiled peeper

Laurent Dumortier works in oxymorons (contradiction in terms). The title could also have been: a clear darkness, an obscure luminosity, a presence of absence, a fiction of reality, a dream like realism, true fantasies... All these dualities cover only a part of the artist's complex approach, which reveals to us images that we would have thought invisible.

He places clues. The subject of each displayed drawing, is a window, borrowed from any vacant or occupied building. The window is made real by the suggested pane of glass, an invisible filter between our gaze and what is being viewed. This occurs naturally as a window is transparent. However, elements may arise that might hinder our direct vision of the proposed image (mist, dust, dirt, cracks, traces, reflections, etc.) making it not always immediately accessible. Similar to a real glass pane, put in by a framer to protect the work, it is there to remind us, even before examination, that the image is not real life.

Dumortier often re-frames the original motif, the one that stays between four walls or haunts them, thanks to the presence of the raw white of one or more sashes. They outline other mini-frames of varying surfaces within the whole frame. Each work, while unique, becomes plural. The unit becomes fragmented, giving only snatches of itself, settling into a *mise en abyme*.

The role of a *trompe l'oeil* is to suggest a three-dimensional impression when there are only two. Here, these charcoal works, on flat paper, contain delicate real reliefs. On close inspection, the alchemist who conceived them sometimes concocts subtle mixtures of acrylic and charcoal dust that add a barely perceptible thickness, revealed under close scrutiny. The technique used is first of all applying the material to paper, which results in a kind of velvet touch that attracts the eye and makes the hand want to touch the support. The variations that attenuate the blackness arise from successive erasures.

The general atmosphere is linked to the established interaction between light and dark. It is not the famous *chiaroscuro* popularised by Rembrandt. Nor is it, despite the artist's references to the Dane William Hammershøi, the use of a luminosity that comes essentially from elsewhere, as if from the backstage of a theatre or from behind a film set. Nor does it have anything to do with Georges de la Tour's penumbra.

More so with the emerging glows of Jean-Michel François' recent acrylics. Even more with the nocturnal photos of Vanden Eeckhoudt, whose two feet are said to be planted on either side of the border separating dream and reality. No doubt this coincides with the landscape research on black and white currently being attempted by Laurent Delaire, who disturbs reality by shifting it towards a sort of parallel universe freed from its concrete rationality.

In Laurent Dumortier's work, the confrontation of light and dark leads to a close mystery, as well as the peeper's equivocal difficulty to win over the spectator. And if his works appear to be narrative, the stories they tell can only be imagined by the viewer. Initially because his drawings are filled with the presence of absent people. Even when there seems to be nothing, apart from a few distorted objects. Then, when presences are evoked, or even invoked, they either gradually disappeared or are represented by bodily fragments, as if they had escaped from Francis Bacon's fantasy world. Finally, after careful observation, the explorer fond of black and white, reveals himself to be a discreet rich colourist.

There is no question of identifying the beings summoned. They are animated by an internal excitement, which can do without the need for too many precise details that would impoverish their potential imaginary. Ghosts? Angels? Demons? Zombies ? Humans? Animals? Probably a bit of all of these at once, hybrids with coloured shades rather than personalised grades. Here and there, they could to be x-rays or scans.

The fact remains that, dragged along by our peeper, we insidiously penetrate an intimacy, the privacy of a living space with one or other of the familiar furnishings. A floor lamp or an armchair in its luminous halo, creating shadows of unknown origin; a kind of opera curtain with heavy and dusty folds opening or closing on an everyday scene, one can hardly guess; diaphanous forms fluttering around a low table with off-centre legs; or a computer screen broadcasting a polychrome fog of pixels, looking like a white line silhouette.

Then in other decor and atmosphere, there is a red pot of yellow flowers; in which a lost bird would have taken refuge; placed near a misty magma having some connection with humidity, which would colonize the walls. Here is a striped cushion, a staircase with its railing, a mauve carpet... .

This domestic universe is close to our own, except that it is not a setting that is transmitted by the drawing. It is the capture of a moment in this place, a temporal vision which leads the draughtsman to fix an event of the past, like the use of carbon 14 to date an archaeological object. The ambiguity between reality and dream is expressed in the blurring of the lines, in the recollection of the image rather than in the vision. Hence an extraordinary opening towards the fantastic.

Laurent Dumortier is rooted in a Belgian literary tradition, that (and here we have the oxymoron again) of 'real fantasy' or 'fantastic reality'. It is therefore logical to consider him as an instinctive illustrator of writers who, in all or part of their books, has tried to merge these two oppositions through their writing. Here he is alongside Maurice Maeterlinck, Jean Ray, Franz Hellens, Thomas Owen, Henri Michaux, Paul Willems, Jean-Baptiste Baronian, Xavier Hanotte, Jacques Sternberg, Eric Dejaeger, Carino Bucciarelli ... A superb way of combining visuals and words with a technical skill that makes it impossible to discern the real from the fake.

Michel Voiturier  
Art Critic

**Bio express :** Laurent Dumortier (1989, Namur, Belgium)

Laurent Dumortier (1989, Namur, Belgium) studied in the drawing workshop at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Brussels (2010-2016) and obtained an in-depth Master's degree in partnership with the ULG. He has participated in several artistic residencies including the Fondation Privée du Carrefour des arts (2019-2020) and has been selected for the Prix artistique de la ville de Tournai (2021), the Prix Jeune artiste du Rouge-Cloître (November 2022).

#### USEFUL INFORMATION

<b>EXHIBITION DATES</b>	<b>Laurent Dumortier "Whisper of the Windows"</b>
<b>Vernissage</b>	06.11 au 17.12.2022
<b>Armistice</b>	Sunday 06.11.2022 from 2-7pm
<b>Rivoli Open Sunday</b>	<b>Friday 11.11.2022 from 2-6pm</b>
	Sunday 04.12.2022 from 2-6pm
<b>Opening days</b>	Open Thursday to Saturday from 11am-6pm and/or by appointment
<b>ADDRESS</b>	Rivoli Building Chaussée de Waterloo 690 / 25 1180 Brussels (opposite Inno Bascule)
<b>CONTACT :</b>	<a href="mailto:info@msgallery.be">info@msgallery.be</a> / Mob/+32 478 716 296 / <a href="http://www.micheleschoonjansgallery.be">www.micheleschoonjansgallery.be</a>

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