

WHAT'S YOUR GRAY ZONE ?

REBECCA BRODSKIS

LOU COCODY-VALENTINO

ESTHER MICHAUD

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Beyond being colors, black and white are opposites. They are markers that structure our worlds through their contrasts, signaling a camp to which we can relate in order to order our thoughts and guide our actions. Categories are an imperative for shaping the architecture of our environments, without which we would have no direction.

For its summer exhibition, SEPTIEME explores the question that underlies its identity, that of the in-between. By refusing to adhere to one polarity or another, SEPTIEME delves into the gray area between things, tackling the interstitial territories unaffiliated with groups, organizations, identifications and stratifications, inserting itself into the indistinct and the heterogeneous.

Deciding to compose in the gray zone means blurring categories and rendering them unusable. Refusing to tick boxes allows us to expel binary thinking and generate the new by making our view of the world more complex; it means including those who don't fit into the system's norms and emancipating ourselves from classifications. Stirring up space with its complexities in order to gray out the lines and furrows of identification, we participate in producing the multitude, authorizing the unpredictable and the indescribable. For SEPTIEME, it is an act of liberation, an escape from collective authority through the regeneration of thought. For this exhibition, Rebecca Brodskis, Lou Cocody-Valentino and Esther Michaud propose to destabilize our fixed perceptions, leading us into the imbalance of gray, free from the beacons of identification, allowing us to lose ourselves in the meanders of our imaginations.

Rebecca Brodskis' paintings provoke a moment of doubt; it is impossible to associate her characters with preconceived notions. Decontextualized, they flirt with the lines of gender, origin and belonging, allowing us to observe them in their full individuality, as in the painting *Antonella*, of this gray-skinned woman with androgynous features. In *Eldar*, Rebecca brings hands out of the frame, breaking the lines of the painting. These hands belong to others, signifying the relationships possible when norms are transgressed, provoking a dialogue in unison.

Lou Cocody-Valentino explores the geography of underwater landscapes in her *Underwaterscapes* series, questioning their influence on identities and echoing the gray zone of the in-between. The ocean is what flows between two lands, what connects two spaces that face each other. Water is what infiltrates, dilutes and softens, deforming and relaxing materials until they are completely eroded, so that everything blends together and becomes entangled. *Gorgone Plume* is a painting-sculpture; at once monolithic and fluid, this work is inspired by an underwater plant that can grow up to two meters high, swaying in the perpetual motion of the Caribbean Sea currents. Halfway between sculpture and painting, *Coral Map* is a 3D "painting" representing an abstract map of a bleached coral reef fragment. *Coral Map* is composed of a wooden panel, painted and covered with recycled paper pulp, which seems to emerge from the wall. The piece is made using a variety of paints, giving it a glazed appearance that may evoke that of ceramic enamels.

As for Esther Michaud, she experiments with the realm between man and nature, often placed in opposition in Western thought. She painstakingly produces disturbing assemblages that deliberately sow doubt between what is man-made and what precedes it. Artifice blurs reference points, repairing before our very eyes the discontinuity established between Man and Nature; as in her works in the *Mauvaises Herbes* series, where Esther intentionally sneaks synthetic plant shoots between stones.



BIOGRAPHY

REBECCA BRODSKIS (b. 1988 in France) lives and works in Paris. She spent most of her childhood traveling and living between France and Morocco. Brodskis studied painting at the Ateliers des Beaux Arts de la Ville de Paris and at Central St. Martins in London, graduating in 2010. In 2015, she also completed a Master's degree in Sociology, focusing her research on the themes of vulnerability and social crisis. Brodskis has exhibited in numerous international galleries with a number of solo and group shows (Kristin Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Fabienne Levy Gallery, Steve Turner Gallery, Christine König Gallery).

Exploring the borders of the sensible world, Brodskis' work evolves between conscious and unconscious spaces, leading to a reflection on existence, the self and the otherness. A prominent idea throughout Brodskis' work is that of being in an in-between, intermediate space at the cross-roads of empirical reality and imagination, order and disorder, materialism and spirituality, determinism and freedom.

LOU COCODY-VALENTINO (Martinique, 1994) is a visual artist whose language is rooted in memories of her insular childhood. Her work questions a personal geography, unfolding in composite installations. They result from a process of reflection around color, composition, and translucency of materials. After having studied traditional printing techniques, Lou is now experimenting with glazed materials, seeking to find the point of convergence between them using various techniques, including vegetable dyeing, silk-screening, sewing... Her work tends towards the creation of a body of work, answering the central question that drives her, that of the influence that territories and landscapes can have on identity.

Her practice is centered on the landscape as a main character, representing it abstractly through different media (sculpture, painting, textiles...) and using it as an element to connect with visitors. Lou's most recent works focus on the representation of aquatic landscapes, considering the seas and oceans as a universal terrain for dialogue with a diverse audience. Having grown up on an island, surrounded by the sea, the artist sees the sea as a space of possibilities, play, colors and textures that don't exist on dry land. It's the space that connects us, the "in-between islands" of the Archipelago. The works presented here are made mainly from pigmented paper pulp; layers of this recycled material accumulate, just as layers of sediment form reliefs. The aesthetics of these pieces, part of a series entitled underwater landscapes, are inspired by the underwater landscapes the artist has observed over the years during dives in the Caribbean Sea, and constitute a play of colors, layers and textures. They evoke another world, populated by geological formations and underwater flora.

ESTHER MICHAUD was born in 1993 and grew up in the Ardennes, today she lives and works in Paris. After a stint at the Rietveld Academy in Amsterdam in textiles, she graduated in 2018 from the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs de Paris in Printed Image.

Esther Michaud's work is a complex and fertile union of vegetal, manufactured and technological elements, where nature intertwines with a world entirely shaped by man. Through sculptures, installations and pictorial compositions, she intervenes in an almost surgical manner on materials collected using diverted techniques such as weaving, embroidery or welding. Her grafts combine the organic with elementary materials of industrial and technological origin. Exploring the principles of mutation and metamorphosis, she is interested in the formative process of organic entities and reinvents the language of plants. Her manipulations give birth to hybrid beings that question the limits of biological emancipation from nature. Drawing a link between entities that seem incompatible, her work proposes a symbiosis, blurring the traditional confrontation of natural/artificial, organic/inorganic, human/non-human, living/abiotic. Her works seek to cast a new light on the exploitation of nature and to question its future in the face of the impact of human intervention.

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