

**LES DOUCHES
LA GALERIE**

PRESS KIT

PAUL POUVREAU

LITERALLY AND FIGURATIVELY

OPENING ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH FROM 6 TO 9 PM

EXHIBITION FROM NOVEMBER 15, 2019 TO JANUARY 18, 2020



© Paul Pouvreau / Courtesy Les Douches la Galerie, Paris

We are very pleased to welcome Paul Pouvreau among the artists that Les Douches la Galerie represents. With his new work, *Les Invasives [Invasive]*, Pouvreau continues his thirty-year project of hijacking household objects, those insignificant things that take over our modes of consumption. He overturns the codes of classical representation in photography. No anecdotes, no certainty. There is nothing that is «ready to think» or «ready to see». His work lies between reality and fiction; it is a metaphor for our times, where the viewer's gaze gets lost in the wanderings of the imagination.

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Wednesday - Saturday
2-7 pm
or by appointment

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Since the early 1980s, Paul Pouvreau has been developing a body of photographic work that highlights ordinary, insignificant objects: domestic appliances, boxes, plastic bags, dust... His aim is "to focus attention on those little things of no consequence that often house just about everything". While plumbing the real, Pouvreau also dips into the History of Art and sets up his photographs as installations. What interests him is the way in which the visual signs he chooses (logos and various types of packaging) dialogue with both everyday space and the space of the exhibition. Continually questioning the image and its representation, his artistic work integrates drawings and collages as well.

Literally and Figuratively highlights the equivalency of multiple meanings that conceal paradoxes and contradictions connected to representation, nature, beauty, rubbish and artificiality, comparing ideas and materials. For the exhibition on display at Les Douches La Galerie, the artist has brought together three groups of works: *Faits divers [Little News Items]* (2003), *Mascarades* (2015-) and *Les invasives [Invasive]* (2018-). These works are very much groups and not series, a term that is often used in photography and that the artist sees as somewhat conventional. "I tend to use the word group because in the things I develop there are elements that come back over time. An idea I created two years ago may appear in another form, modifying or clarifying a question that I might have dealt with at a given moment, as if it remained just as current."¹

FAITS DIVERS

In *Faits divers* (2003), Paul Pouvreau adopts the principle used in advertising, namely the packshot (an object photographed against a neutral background). He arranges plastic bags that dialogue amongst each other, often humorously, by juxtaposing signs and coloured forms. The plastic bags make up a new figure that is ephemeral, fragile and often incongruous with respect to the use we make of them as consumer products. Their arrangement invites us to leave behind their status as packaging, bringing forth several sculptural forms across the images. According to the artist, "So this way of displaying different signs comes alive in photographs of plural relationships, creating zones of interference and ambivalence between the natural and the constructed, the real and the fictive, subject and object." For Pouvreau, these experiments are drawn from notes and observations that he makes directly in situ paying special attention to the forms and different, varied media that the image adopts in urban space.

"We are essentially looking at simple images, with no affective element and little to no effect. A composition that displays ordinary materials (paper bag, plastic bag, box) is also the result of simple, basic movements. Photographs show the result of an action and prove its existence, a rudimentary action after all that we carry out day after day when we throw out packaging. The arranged forms nevertheless show glimpses of certain visual details that, in their own way, feature two actions. A light, fragile object-form, immobilised by photography, giving it the appearance of an involuntary,

¹ *Toute chose est son double*, conversation between Isabelle Tessier and Paul Pouvreau in *Empreinte du reste*, Éd. Poursuite, 2018.

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anonymous sculpture that seems to tower there before us like a simple, formal sign (its anonymity reinforced through photography). But then, looking at them more closely, like visual puzzles, the photos present different representations of movements captured in the moment. They suggest them more than they present them. Like the figure of the discus-thrower in sculpture, the photograph makes us believe for a moment in the illusion of a movement and a time that in reality are always already past. All of these captured moments link up motionlessly, each one in its place, separated from each other. In the images, it is the invisible movement of things that paradoxically suggests itself by arrested, immobile, frozen forms. This paradox of the medium is what these photographs try to show with the group of visual clues that make it up. In one way or another, it improbably shows us the forms of an aporia. In such a way, these photographs are similar to the scattered signs of an insignificant news item that we need to gather up, corroborate, recompose, re-evaluate, if we want to understand, with greater or lesser certainty, the facts."²

MASCARADES

The group *Mascarades* features models on glazed paper hawking luxury products, "redrawn" with various elements and materials (tacks, needles, petals, rubber-bands) placed on the images. In order to construct these hidden figures with a tactile and photographic movement, Pouvreau gathers together various elements that he has at hand without immediately having a precise idea of how to use them. "They form a sort of databank that enriches my field and research on merchandise, such as logos, advertising brochures, packaging, etc. So I began saving full-page newspaper advertisements for important brands without initially knowing what would happen. Then, gradually the idea of altering these slick, idealized representations of men and women began to grow. I wanted to make their faces more grotesque, sometimes even disturbing, by remodelling them through "ephemeral" collages, i.e. collages that exist only through their photographic inscription. Clearly I was thinking of the collages of Raoul Hausmann, Hannah Höch and Max Ernst that destructure one form to recompose another. When you look at Ernst's collages, they are both very lovely and very dreamlike, like something from a fable, obviously, since they were meant to illustrate *La femme 100 têtes* [*The Hundred Headless Woman*]. The intention behind *Mascarades* is different. I wanted to make the images of magnificently drawn faces with no snags less perfect. So I applied other cosmetics to their faces, things I call "ingredients", i.e. objects, substances and materials that I often have at hand, in my office, like tacks, needles, salt, faded flower petals, etc. I simply drop these materials on the printed surface of the faces and they fall in such a way that the faces look like a mask frozen by photography. The faces testify to the perishable nature of everything around us, of beauty that fades, of loved ones who are there and who pass. *Mascarades* harks back as much to the world of carnival which is also a figure for death, for our fleeting passage on earth. I don't think there is any misogynistic intention on my part in my representation of women; it is more that I question the powerful fascination that beauty hides, which is almost a type of abstraction. I know this beauty is perhaps nothing but a façade, a mask on a reality that is more wrinkled and often more violent than

² Paul Pouvreau, Notes, 2013-2019

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one we are allowed to see. I often have the feeling that my work situates a thing and its opposite as the two faces of an image: on one side, the fascinating, absorbing transparency that we dive into, and on the other a more opaque, ambiguous form, the one that in fact blocks and from which the image cannot escape if it wants to exist."³

LES INVASIVES

By manipulating, assembling and juxtaposing coloured plastic bags, Paul Pouvreau creates a nature that belongs only to him. An artificial nature that he produces by delicately using a substance composed of a variety of species of flowers collected in impressively seductive bouquets. The arrangement of the bags generates a world that is both familiar and strange. He combines them with a multitude of creases and folds where the emptiness, transparency, superposition and juxtaposition of layers produce shadings and combinations of colour. His compositions are harmonious in their forms and materials: they are sham corals and leaves, yet they are no less bouquets offered to the viewer who is captivated by their rapture and seductive power. While his intention is not to copy particular natural species – since plastic produces forms and varieties that are proper to it – the artist nevertheless sublimates the object in the handling and discovery of possibilities of matter. And opposites meet through this investigation. The art of cultivating not vegetable matter but seductive and invasive plastic species is in fact symptomatic of a society confronted by paradoxical, contradictory messages. Messages that are based on the one hand on systematically stimulating our desire to consume in every-growing quantities, pushed by marketing and advertising, and on the other on the need to actively protect the environment, by limiting waste in particular. Representations of vegetable matter then reveal our proximity to nature but also distance us from it by using plastic bags that are harmful to flora and fauna. The waste spread across the planet leads to a change in ecosystems and at the same time represents a danger to certain animals through suffocation and strangling. *Les invasives* are objects that are recycled through an artistic act, immobilised by the photographic medium, and reaching a place where they become a passage and exchange between matter and thought. Their presence opens a path for a new existence in the disappointment of a world whose sad end they signal, majestically and in colour.

Isabelle Tessier

Director of the Artothèque de Vitré

³ *Toute chose est son double*, conversation between Isabelle Tessier and Paul Pouvreau in *Empreinte du reste*, Éd. Poursuite, 2018.

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IMAGES

Paul Pouvreau

Les furies, 2016

Pigment inkjet print on Canson paper 300 g

Print: 30 x 44 inches

Edition N° 2/5

© Paul Pouvreau / Courtesy Les Douches
la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. PP1909007



Paul Pouvreau

Faits divers, 2003-2004

Cibachrome print

Print: 28 x 40 inches

Edition N° 1/5

© Paul Pouvreau / Courtesy Les Douches
la Galerie, Paris

N° Inv. PP1909002



Paul Pouvreau

Les invasives, 2018

Pigment inkjet print on Platine Fibre Rag

Canson paper

Print: 25 x 38 inches

Edition N° 1/5

© Paul Pouvreau / Courtesy Les Douches
la Galerie

N° Inv. PP1906009



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IMAGES

Paul Povvreau

Mascarade, 2015-2016

Pigment inkjet print on Platine Fibre Rag

Canson paper

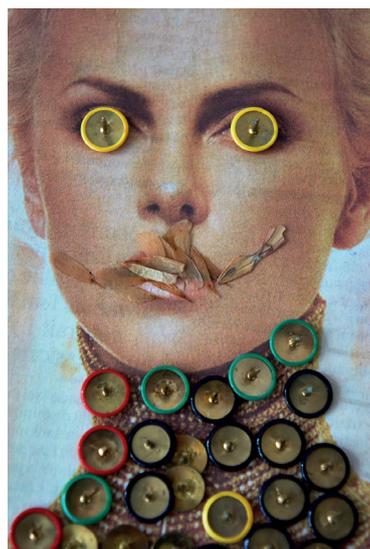
Print: 20,8 x 13 inches

Edition N° 1/5

© Paul Povvreau / Courtesy Les Douches la

Galerie

N° Inv. PP1608001



Paul Povvreau

Mascarade, 2015-2016

Pigment inkjet print on Platine Fibre Rag

Canson paper

Print: 20,8 x 13 inches

Edition N° 1/5

© Paul Povvreau / Courtesy Les Douches la

Galerie

N° Inv. PP1608007



Paul Povvreau

Variations, 2015

Pigment inkjet print on Canson paper 300 g

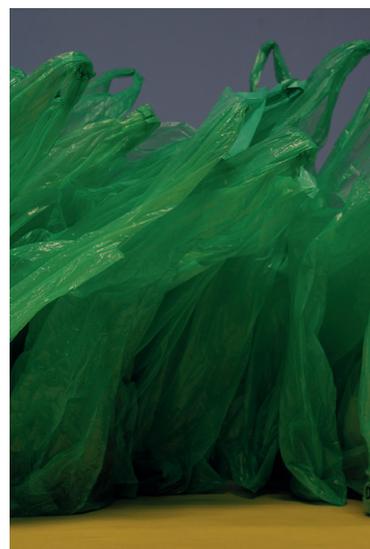
Print: 35 x 28 inches

Edition N° 1/5

© Paul Povvreau / Courtesy Les Douches la

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N° Inv. PP1909004



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PAUL POUVREAU

BIOGRAPHY

Paul Pouvreau was born in 1956 in Aulnay-sous-Bois. He splits his time between Montreuil and Argenton-sur-Creuse and is a professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de la Photographie (ENSP) in Arles.

His artistic work has been featured in a wide variety of exhibitions in France and abroad: the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Centre photographique d'Ile-de-France (CPIF), the Rencontres d'Arles, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Val-de-Marne (MAC VAL), the Regional Centre for Contemporary Art (CRAC) in Sète, the Regional Collection of Contemporary Art (FRAC) for Basse-Normandie in Caen and the FRAC for Corsica, the Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire in Paris and Brussels, the Ho Chi Minh City Museum of Fine Arts in Vietnam, the Galerie Nei Licht in Dudelange, Luxembourg, as well as Smack Mellon in Brooklyn, USA, to name only a few.

His works can be seen in numerous both private and public collections, including the National Foundation for Contemporary Art (FNAC), the FRAC for Alsace, Corsica, Franche-Comté, Limousin and Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur, the Artothèques of Caen, Vitré, Limoges, Lyon, Nantes and Pessac, the Musée de Valence, the Centre Georges Pompidou and others.

PAUL POUVREAU

C.V.

Solo Shows (selection)

- 2019** *Le magazine des jours*, Centre photographique d'Île-de-France, Pontault-Combault
- 2017** *Des choses à part*, Artothèque de Vitré
- 2016** *Variations saisonnières*, Galerie municipale Jean Collet, Vitry-sur-Seine
K'Foto Buff, Busan, Corée
- 2013** *Produits dérivés*, Centre d'art image/imatge, Orthez
Matières premières, CRAC Languedoc-Roussillon, Sète
- 2012** *Archi Comble*, commande publique du CNAP as part of the Rencontres de la photographie d'Arles
Perspectives cavalières, La Filature, Mulhouse
- 2010** *Fin de série*, Les ateliers de l'image, Marseille
- 2008** *Documents à l'appui*, Villa du Parc, Annemasse
- 2005** *Paul Pouvreau*, Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Paris
- 2004** *Paul Pouvreau*, FRAC Alsace, Sélestat
- 2003** *Paul Pouvreau*, Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Bruxelles, Belgium

Group Shows (selection)

- 2019** *Photographie et documents 1983-2018*, Frac PACA, Marseille
- 2018** *La tempête*, CRAC, Sète
- 2017** *Sans réserve*, MAC/VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine
- 2015** *L'art est la chose*, Le Carré, Château-Gontier
- 2014** *Absurde, vous avez dit absurde ?*, Galerie Les Filles du Calvaire, Paris
Monument, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Calais
Monument, Sainsbury Art Center, Norwich, United Kingdom
- 2013** *Des images comme des oiseaux*, La Friche La Belle de Mai, Marseille
- 2008** *Mois de l'image*, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Ho Chi Minh Ville, Vietnam
- 2006** *Les peintres de la vie moderne*, Donation - Photographic collection of the Caisse des Dépôts, Centre Pompidou, Paris
- 2003** Roebing Hall Gallery, Brooklyn, USA
- 2002** *Rendez-vous*, as part of the Paris-Brooklyn exchange, Smack Mellon, Brooklyn, USA
- 2001** *Le paysage comme Babel*, Galerie les Filles du Calvaire, Bruxelles, Belgium

Publications (selection)

- 2018** *Empreinte du reste*, Poursuite Édition
- 2017** *Le monde à plat*, Éditions Loco
- 2016** *Variations saisonnières*, Éditions Galerie municipale Jean Collet, Vitry
- 2014** *La Photographie en Acte(s)*, Filigranes Éditions
- 2005** *Paul Pouvreau*, Editions Filigranes