

A personal investigation of painting

Lush, dreamy, and ethereal - French-Caribbean artist Alexandre Lenoir's large-scale paintings delicately blending the figurative and the abstract have an almost hypnotic power. Despite being only in his 20s, rising talent Lenoir is already represented by reputed gallery Almine Rech, at whose Paris headquarters he had his debut solo show this year. At the time of this interview, he is in his studio near Orly airport, getting ready for his first exhibition, Sur le fil / On the Edge, at the gallery's Brussels branch this fall.

L'OFFICIEL ART: One generally imagines a painter in a solitary atelier, working in silence. It sounds like that's not the case here?

ALEXANDRE LENOIR: At the moment, we're eight people. There's a studio manager, assistants... We're working on eight or nine paintings at the same time.

Does this mean you're not the only one holding the brush?

Exactly. I have assistants who do what I call 'executing gestures.' They are not painters. For them, it's like a physical exercise, a meditative experience. I project photographs on the canvas, covering sections of the image with strips, and give them detailed instructions. When several people are involved in the process, it charges the painting with a certain energy. I am interested in dissecting the creation process, working with its different elements. I have done a lot of experimenting with that. Everything that contributes to the painting being made is the brush. The studio floor is the brush, the people are the brush... Me speaking to them is painting, and me imagining the finished canvas is painting as well. I am curious about questions like 'Does the painting need to be done by the artist himself or can it just appear?' 'Am I really necessary?' 'Where are the boundaries of my work?' I came to the conclusion that the same process will not render the same results, which means that, in the end, the painting is stronger than the concept, the process.

Where do you find the photographs that build the basis for your paintings?

Sometimes I take them myself and sometimes they are photos I find. I only use photographs that have a deep personal meaning for me, for example an image that captures the moment when my parents first met.

How did you know you wanted to be a painter?

When I entered art school and saw the painting department, I instantly knew this was the genre for me. From that moment on, all I did was paint. I focused less on school and more on painting and being in the studio, where I felt free. Art school doesn't leave a lot of mental space. I never saw myself as a student, I just painted and painted. Painting is the center of my life. Even now, I still work almost in the same way as in the beginning: with primary colors, a projector, and in large format.

It's a big step to be represented by a gallery like Almine Rech. Do you feel any pressure?

No. I see it as a catalyst. It makes you want to produce more works. I see everything as an opportunity to paint. Exhibitions are important, and I feel blessed that Almine offers me this space for a while, but it's not why I do this. The point is to make paintings. That's my life. Everything else is an add-on. I went to see the space in Brussels, which is enormous, and instead of feeling intimidated by it, it inspired me. I created a lot of works specifically with this space in mind. It resonated with me and directly made me think of a piece I did when I was 22 that is related to water and floating, which will be part of the exhibition. The gallery space evokes this feeling of being underwater. You have to walk down stairs to get to it; it's like one giant pool.

Has this year's pandemic had an impact on your work?

I spent a lot of time at my parents' house, in a calm place, with people I care about. Confinement was an important moment for me. It meant a lot of alone time, a quietness of the soul, and enabled me to go into depth. I worked completely on my own, as opposed to now, and two canvasses from that time will be part of the upcoming show.

What do you hope to evoke in the viewer?

I want to create a space in their heads, open a door for them, maybe to a memory the viewer has experienced. Maybe you'll see something you lived before.

Sur le fil / On the Edge
Almine Rech,
Rue de l'Abbaye 20,
1050 Brussels
October 15 - December 19
alminerech.com



The artist in his studio. Courtesy of the artist and Almine Rech
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