

Paul de Flers

Poisson - Scorpion

Sep 12 — Oct 26, 2024 | New York, Upper East Side

Almine Rech New York, Upper East Side is pleased to present, *Poisson - Scorpion*, Paul de Flers' fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from September 12 to October 26, 2024.

"Isolation is not a place, but a condition." This reflective line from Nicolas Bouvier's novel *Le Poisson-Scorpion* serves as a central theme in this new body of work from Paul de Flers. Bouvier's narrative of exile and introspection on the remote Rodrigues Island finds a visual counterpart in de Flers' paintings, which are set in the tropical paradise of Pico, at the edge of the Azores archipelago. However, this paradise, much like the island in Bouvier's novel, is both a physical and psychological space where characters confront their inner selves.

The artist creates intimate scenes of alienation in remote and unknown settings, where there is no reference to time or the identities. His characters await the unrevealed, gazing in unspecified directions. What has captured their attention? The tension within these scenes is so profound that it extends beyond the canvas, drawing viewers into an inward-looking dialogue with de Flers' blurry figures. De Flers makes the contours and perspectives disappear, extending our gaze to feel the dissolving of colors and find the hidden shapes within the oil.

In Bouvier's *Le Poisson-Scorpion*, the protagonist's physical exile to Rodrigues Island becomes a metaphor for inner turmoil and self-discovery. Similarly, de Flers' paintings reflect a journey of introspection. The dead fish by the shore in his works induce a potent sense of abandonment and desolation, mirroring the existential plight of Bouvier's character. These lifeless fish symbolise the end of one existence and the commencement of a deeper, often agonising journey of self-realisation.

The influence of the late writer and painter Henry Darger writ large in de Flers' art. Darger's ability to create unusual, imaginary worlds and sketch tales of good and evil resonates through the eerie scenes of gatherings seen in de Flers' works. These focused and alienated crowds, bound by the borders of the panavision format, are also an ode to cinema. The opera of still-focused figures is surrounded by propulsive action of nature and bright colors, creating a deeply rhythmic, cinematic image and opening the discourse about what is real and what is a dream.

De Flers' self-evaluative challenge is masked by the seeming softness of his paintings, drawing parallels to the color palette and paint application of French Impressionists. His landscapes evoke the countryside paintings of Paul Cézanne and Auguste Renoir mixed with tropical depictions of Paul Gauguin's life among native Tahitians, surrounded by a signature multitude of green hues. However, de Flers adds unique colors, such as luminous pinks, intense greens, and vibrant oranges, claiming ownership of his distinctive color scheme.

Paintings of blurred figures evoke winter landscapes reminiscent of Claude Monet or Giuseppe De Nittis, who, similar to de Flers, dedicated much attention to painting volcanic landscapes, as shadows are laid with the help of soft, almost lilac tones. Unlike de Flers' motionless, introspective figures, the elements of nature burst with dynamism and vigor. This contrast suggests a return of agency to nature, as humans stand at its mercy, dissociated and confused.

The selection of Paul de Flers' paintings that will be on show at the Almine Rech Gallery in New York allows the public to partake in an intimate ritual, possibly a moment before the initiation of a Proudhon-inspired self-governing tribe of highly self-aware individuals, hidden away from the scrutiny of the modern world. After all, the father of Impressionism, Camille Pissarro, to whom de Flers' production is an evident ode, was a zealous (yet peaceful) anarchist. Perhaps other than the guiding principles of how to produce "impressions" of the world, de Flers has also subscribed to the political dimension of Pissarro's teachings, which finds its expression in his works.

— Natalia Gierowska, Editor-at-Large at The Brooklyn Rail, political scientist and art critic