ALMINE RECH

Paul de Flers
Black Island

Mar 1 — Apr 6, 2023 | London

Black Island is simultaneously a fable, and an invitation to undertake a journey. Paul de Flers transports us into a uchronia: a real space becomes a dream or fantasy setting, outside of time.

The island of Pico forms one of the edges of the triangle of the Azores archipelago. A volcano dominates the entire island with its solemn stature. Made of endless lava, the ground consists only of burnt stones, covering the western side of the island with a black crust and volcanic vegetation. Its shores have fashioned a multitude of myths and legends in the artist's work.

Paul de Flers' paintings convey a lost paradise, with a stormy, intoxicating atmosphere. By means of merging colors and blurry edges, the scenes propose the viewer as witnessing an intimate moment, through a window misted with memory.

Raul Brandão lyrically described the island in the late 19th century: "of unique beauty, of admirable color, it exerts a strange power of attraction on the visitor." Paul de Flers' work embraces this fascination. The viewer becomes a voyeur before the faceless figures painted by the artist.

These paintings evoke Edward Hopper transposed into nature, haloed with dreamlike haze. The blurriness seems to recall sensory memory. In the symbolism of the volcano, we encounter the childlike fascination with its energetic potential, like that of the child itself, alluding to our own internal violence.

It is impossible to miss the contrast between the name of the mountain that gives the exhibition its title, and this space of light and gentleness. The palette, dominated by peaceful blue, recalls the work of August Macke, the young Expressionist painter who at the end of his life focused on themes of nature and humanity, much like Paul de Flers.

— Milena Oldfield, Researcher & Editorial Coordinator at Almine Rech