

# CLAIREGASTAUD

## LEO DORFNER

### Texts

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Léo Dorfner: Stories from the city

Because by dint of proliferation, the images have today lost their roughness, become as smooth as the virtual space of their diffusion, Léo Dorfner proposes a punk reading that disturbs too chaste interpretations. His reappropriation of media representations, advertising icons, fragments of everyday life and visual memes draws a rock mythology of the contemporary as incredulous as undisciplined. By borrowing and quoting, by arrangement, collage and marking, he gives form to exploded narratives, often absurd and anachronistic, in which PJ Harvey is commented on the history of art, Greek statues express themselves on debates of society and pine-treesup magazine proudly display their tattoos. Carrying a real critical potential, his movements never sacrifice the aesthetic interest of drawing. Despite the impertinence of his subjects, his work indeed displays an undeniably poetic dimension that is based on the taste for graphic experimentation and the care taken in the composition, at the heart of a plastic game between the texture of the paper, the quality of the line, the shade of the colors and any legends that illustrate them. The urban stories he invites us to reveal the beautiful impertinence of his gaze and the ability of superimposed images to make sense, against and against all logic. In his most recent works, the artist isolates and intuitively combines fragments of images found on the net, based on a minimal narrative that lends itself to the free interpretation of the public. The cuts made at the heart of digital flows thus make it possible to redirect the attention of the public to stage, on paper, associations of ideas at first glance impertinent. A woman wounded as she wears makeup or a declaration of self-esteem referred to a tear of sadness are enough to build a bittersweet reading of the original images, in which the pleasure of the eyes is thwarted by the disillusionment of meaning. The use of legends (rock lyrics or popular expressions) supports this iconoclastic intention by creating shifts conducive to an ironic treatment. For him, humour remains the best remedy for the latent pessimism of the time. His falsely naive injunctions to positive psychology (calls to pleasure on flowery posters) thus plead for an ambiguous hedonism, Léo Dorfner affirming that all enjoyment (aesthetic) is always paid at the price of a certain chaos. Despite the reference of his work to these alternative and protest cultures, Léo Dorfner never adopts a nihilistic posture towards art. It is not for him to refuse beauty, quite the contrary, but to propose a re-evaluation of his canons, outside of any academicism. The tattoos on photos, signature pieces of the artist, are thus a properly vandal gesture, by which the artist appropriates and defiles the body of magazine pin-ups, or that of holy icons, as to dress them with new ornaments. This epidermal redaction – which saturates the bodies with motifs of beer mugs, insults, diamonds or skulls, or all the visual codes of rock culture – then seems to announce the twilight of the old idols of glamour in favor of a new aesthetic order, less conventional. More melancholic but no less subversive, the watercolor reproductions of the ancient statuary dislodge the heroes from their pedestals to refer them to a certain irreverence, like the bust of an angry sage or the

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consul Crassus ravaged by his greed. Associated with raw and frontal quotes, the August faces thus lose their quality of serene vestiges to marry a more troubled present, tinged with nostalgia, Léo Dorfner celebrating in his paintings an ancient ephebe with marble skin or seeking to save Theseus from the armchair of oblivion. Between the temptation of no future punk and the risk of tabula rasa in contemporary art, Léo Dorfner argues in fine for a strictly anarchic image economy, which breaks down as much from hierarchies of values as from chronologies.

Florian Gaîté

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*A Thoroughly Modern Rebellion: Léo Dorfner*

Worlds collide in the work of Léo Dorfner; we see high art, mythology and popular media combine to create an azure-inked cacophony of cultures. Dorfner, a Parisian native, was educated at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris and has shown in France, Germany and (just to keep things eclectic) South Korea. Dorfner's work acts as a crystallization of today. Just as we exist in a society balancing on the thin line between progress and tradition, Dorfner's art brings together the past and present in exciting and, often, humorous ways (it is difficult not to let out an amused exhale at a mickey mouse tattoo on the cheek of Andromaque). There is a quiet rebellion running through his work that manifests itself as a obvious product of the time; the idea that Dorfner chooses to corrupt established forms through graffiti and photo manipulation is impossible to sever from the images created by the instagram-generation. With the introduction of social media (and a consequential deterioration of attention span) satire has shifted from the written form to images; a meme now holds as much weight as the Borowitz report when critiquing current events. Dorfner's art sits on this spectrum of social satire, sliding to opposite poles with every new work. His creative process also lends itself to be considered thoroughly modern. When asking about his source of inspiration, Dorfner responded: "It depends also of the moment, for example I always have a camera on me, so when I see something interesting, I shoot it. Sometimes I use the photo as a photo, sometimes, I incorporate it in paintings. I also spend a lot of time searching photos on the internet, that feeds my process of creation, and is a part of my painting work, which is made of different layers; made of different kinds of pictures, found on the internet or that I shot or not, realistic or not, logo or just text." The immediacy of inspiration is a 21st century luxury. At the tap of a few keys we access streams of images and text that we can corrupt and shape to fit any artistic purpose. Dorfner, though heavily infested in the technological aspects of art does, on occasion, turn to his environment for inspiration (being an artist in city of light, it is almost sacrilegious not to consider the Parisian landscape in your work). He writes: "I consider myself as a sponge, I reuse a lot of things I found, and in my drawings on antique prints, you can see many times 'Paris ', or 'PSG' (football team from Paris) or a lot of signs from my home. I was born in Chinatown, and I still work there, so I use very often the logo of Tsingtao, a Chinese beer, that can be seen and drank everywhere. I also look a lot of tattoos for this kind of work, especially vintage. And of course, I see many exhibitions and work from other artists, from classic paintings to minimal sculpture." Léo Dorfner, as an artist of the technological age, sits comfortably in the chasm of colliding cultures and time. He, and his creative process, is the centre of a graffiti-sprawled Venn diagram that is impossible not to appreciate.

Hannah Brattesani

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## PAN

Exhibition catalogue, edited by Sophie Vantieghem and Corinna Weiss, Centre d'art Contemporain HEADQUARTERS, La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, from 20.08 to 27.11.2016.

Originally from Paris, Léo Dorfner studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. A virtuoso watercolourist, it is not limited to a single medium. He develops other techniques such as drawing, sculpture or photography and divides his time between personal creation and artistic direction of the online magazine Branded.

Both inspired by popular culture and scholarly culture, the spectrum of its iconographic sources extends from religious art to mythology, cartoons and auteur cinema. The artist also devotes a true cult to the rock aesthetic, an influence that is reflected in all of his works. Driven by formal concerns, Léo Dorfner first chooses his subjects for their aesthetics and sends back to the viewer a message that is clear and direct, moving away from the tendency to the extreme conceptualization of contemporary art. Sensitive to the graphic design of his everyday products—Gitanes, PSG, Tsingtao, Pizza Hut—his entire work is dotted with logos and advertising slogans that, like leitmotifs, resemble the icons of a contemporary cult. The Internet is also a huge playground where he draws inspiration. His creative process is fueled by this immediate and constant flow of images that he can divert, recycle, tag and reinterpret endlessly. It is also on the web that the artist found the three engravings of the figure of Pan and the nymph Syrinx, presented in the exhibition. Rebel, Léo Dorfner covered their skin with tattoos in blue ink altering forever these original prints. Sacrilege will say some, doodles will say others! The artist certainly does not fear the mix of genres, nor the collision of eras. It combines personal and popular references, humour with the absurd, raw and poetic inscriptions. Skulls, pints of beer, ex-votos, revolvers... Greek deities are thus disguised by these indelible traces delicately scribbled with cobalt pen. Between iconoclastic provocation and identity metamorphosis, Léo Dorfner takes the codes of his generation and superimposes them on the smooth bodies of the divinities of another time, referring them to an irremediably earthly and contemporary condition.

Charlotte Hillion

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Disappearance means both an action, that of disappearing, of being no longer visible, perceptible to the gaze, even to go away, to fade away, to be absent from life and reality, and the ultimate consequence of this action: the inexorable degradation of beings and things, their inescapable loss, what remains, whether we like it or not, the very nature of all life. Thus, in the collective unconscious, if disappearance refers first of all to the impermanence of human destinies, it also contradicts every dream or hope of eternity. Leo Dorfner, in his work, has often echoed it, especially through these figures, which he tattooed with multiple words, signs and marks, until the skin of the paper disappeared under this exacerbated tissue of identity markers that would like to be eternal: design to better conceal, show to better shirk, unveil to better cover up, highly symbolic and emotional tipping points. In this, disappearance, through the experience of lack or the ordeal of mourning, is opposed to destruction, which is not an action or a process, but an act as sudden as irremediable, as definitive as determined. If the disappearance is of the order of the horizontality of time, destruction is of the order of the verticality of the event, a rupture, a break, a gaping of the real. Destruction arises and slices in the quick; it has no use for life, nor even for death; so it does not even bury the corpses it produces, so it does not even worry about making a body or making an image. Destruction carries and brings in itself nothing but this nothingness of the absolute annihilation of the world. Nature was for a long time the perfect allegory of it: from storms to hurricanes, from volcanic eruptions to tidal waves, from earthquakes to incendiary flashes. Until man discovers and realizes that within these disorders of the natural order of things he also possessed a hand of brass and a mouth of ashes capable of the worst cataclysms, and that in all conscience, without hesitation. A human gesture outside the human race, its violence is no longer of the order of the symbolic or of the instinct, but pure exaltation or pure enjoyment. Thus the armed arm of destruction no longer even has to contravene a dream of eternity, it sublimates it by merging life and death, crystallizing the here-below and the beyond. It is not surprising, then, that the acts, the figures and the forms which destruction takes, beyond a simple descent, are most often of the order of the flight, of the ascent towards the sky, of an almost cosmic dematerialization: pyre, cloud, explosion, spraying ... Under the heading Chercher / Détruire - in reference to the song Search & Destroy written in 1973 by Iggy Pop, leader of the American punk-rock band The Stooges, Leo Dorfner's latest works seem to venture between disappearance and destruction, withdrawal from the world and the demolition of reality, the rejection of ordinary existence and the senseless negation of the human. As the artist emphasizes: "To seek / to destroy follows on to Live in fear where the threat was not figurative but just evoked through the defensive positions of the characters represented with axes; the battle takes place, or has taken place... "The titles of the works bear witness to this: Je vais donner à boire à la douleur ; There Will Be Blood ; The Deer Hunter ; Gimme Shelter ; Le Garçon oublié du monde ; Ici se cache le secret de nos vies, Don't Fade Away...

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Also, under the figure of a James Dean shouting with joy or terror, his face covered with oil - one of the most iconic images of George Stevens' film *Giant*(1956) - did the artist record the following sentence: "All his life Jett had sought. He sought where others did not seek, where there was nothing. He was far from suspecting that it was the act itself to seek, whatever the result, which was the object of his quest. Then, when one fine day he found what he thought he had been seeking for so many years, and which seemed to be the beginning of a new life for him, everything darkened, plunged in a darkness at once dense and liquid . He realized that it was actually the end. In an ultimate effort, like a farewell to fear, he opened his mouth and shouted, "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds"

At the same time, it is an allegory of the researcher of (black) gold, of the priest, of the poet, of the artist and of the scientist. This sentence ends with a quotation from the Bhagavad-Gita, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, pronounced on July 6, 1945, at 5:30 am, by the physicist Robert Oppenheimer, scientific director of the very secret Project Manhattan during which, in the laboratory of Los Alamos in New Mexico, American atomic bombs, including Little Boy and Fat Man, were developed, before he resigning.

Here there is no resignation or demobilization, on the contrary, but fragments broken, scattered, disjointed, sparkling in spite of their blackness or savagery, fragments of consciousness, doubts, uncertainties, perplexities, contests or human resistances plotted of skin or with the wire of the razor.

Marc Donnadieu

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The work of Léo Dorfner opens an infinity of doors on a daily universe from which he draws his references, his figures, his words and his sounds. There are packages of Gypsies, tattooed skins, text, rock, women, his neighborhood (the 13th arrondissement) and his friends. A microcosm, his own, which he reproduces through photography, which he transposes onto paper, brush or pen, and that he engraves on objects. For his first solo exhibition at the Galerie ALB, he invites us to enter a secular and baroque & roll sanctuary. Inspired by the generosity of the nineteen-man hangings, by the magic of the cabinets of curiosity and by the walls lined with vinyl from a recording studio, the artist seizes the space of the gallery as he seizes the skin of his models. Living in fear, Rock'n'roll Runaways engages an immersion of the body, the gaze, the mind and the senses. By covering, he puts his signature. Thus, we penetrate his imagination, which nourishes and builds him. Léo Dorfner photographs his daily life, the images are then filtered by painting and drawing. Since 2007, he has developed a repertoire of signs and symbols that form a fishnet on the skins of his friends, his loves and his anonymous encounters. To the titles and excerpts of rock songs, he juxtaposes sms received or sent, quotes, slogans, precautionary advice, insults and symbols (pints of beer, skull, keys, bulbs, hearts, planes and penis constitute an alphabet). The registers are intertwined: from sacred to profane, from staff to collective, from past to present, from trash to mannerism. Iconoclastic and transgressive, he explodes traditional hierarchies by instilling referents from his enmity and subcultures. Thus a tattooed Madonna smokes a cigarette, a saint in underwear wears a hatchet, a Piéta is colonized with signs and aphorisms. The iconographic sources are of multiple origins since the artist can either paint the portrait of a relative, cover an old engraving bought on the Internet, tear a page from a fashion magazine or photograph what surrounds it. The banal and the grandiose interact. The representation of the human figure plays a crucial role. The bodies, in their realities, are restored with particular attention to detail. The environment and clothing are secondary, they pose a context, the real subject remains the skin. Its faults as its charms, reveal the faults, the forces and the intimacy of each of the models. Just like canvas or paper, skin becomes a medium. Naked, it reveals a personality made unique, a privileged relationship, a tenderness, an admiration; tattooed, it is the support for a personal writing. Léo Dorfner's work contains the ardor, insolence, rhythm and poetry of rock. Through autobiographical references, historical and current borrowings, he draws the portrait of a generation that oscillates between the search for lost paradise and the fury of living.

Julie Crenn

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## Smoked signals

Dozens of packs of gypsies, parts in smoke, are the more or less faithful reproductions of covers of cult discs of the history of rock, pop and electro music, indifferently mainstream or alternative. The parallel between the unbridled consumption of tobacco that «kills» - a danger always marked by the official text - and music that is also defined as a visual and societal culture, allows the artist to create a multiple sensory work, both visual, olfactory and sound, stimulating on all these levels the memory of the viewer. To the latter the leisure to recognize or not the groups in work, or to stay at a distance, appreciating above all the diversity of these micro-paintings and their aesthetic qualities.

Through the series, the identical format, the fetishism of the collectible object - which can be found in his series of Shoes - Léo Dorfner can and aspires to mix and match in his world of smoker of gypsies and frenetic watercolourist the history of modern music.

Pauline Daniez