

Birds of a feather fly together

Mehryl Levisse

7 June — 9 July 2017

New York, NY, June 7, 2017: In his first New York solo exhibition *Birds of a feather fly together*, opening June 7th at Catinca Tabacaru Gallery, young French artist Mehryl Levisse presents an eccentric world blending childhood memories, like the drama he learned from his Italian aunts who were mourners and paid to cry at funerals, with art history, BDSM references, and the aesthetics of Champagne-Ardenne, the rural backwoods where he spent his formative years. This history-laden region of France has become neglected as its population dwindles.

“There, decrepit mansions are full of dusty decorations, yellowish wallpapers, and charged ornaments. I love these caulk atmospheres: they are eerie and reassuring at the same time...” says Levisse, whose work was exhibited at Centre Pompidou and Musée de la Chasse in Paris in the past year.

In New York, Levisse has turned the gallery into an immersive environment with every surface covered in his kaleidoscopic wallpaper. Four photographs, six masks, and two performers grace the space, inviting us into their shadowy realm.

Using bodies, his and those of others, Levisse’s aesthetic is infused with nudity and comic situations. Wild and elaborate costumes are meticulously crafted and sewn by his own hand, while privy limbs writhe in colorful Aubusson-esque tapestries. Fantastical characters play hide-and-seek and strike frisky poses while the photographs are blessed with double meanings and a satisfying absurdity. This balance seems fragile, poetic and provocative.

The meticulous sets he creates and installs are parodies of society, both critical and pathetic, manipulating the long-established codes of theater, and implementing the body as an object. He thinks of his photographs as documents, traces of moments and situations that took place in his studio. For this reason, he does not edit or manipulate the images created.

In one image, his lover poses like an Odalisque, a colony of mollusks affixed on his face and flanks. In another frame, Levisse’s bare buttox arises from a sea of dark colored tapestries. The title of the latter, “faire tapisserie” (i.e. to melt into the decor), referring to a phrase to describe people who are not noticed or who are not important – the invisibles.

Six sculptures occupy the center of the gallery’s space. Each is a mask made with precision using such noble materials as fine Calais lace, pearls, leather, ornate tapestry off-cuts, and human hair. They are impaled on iron rods erected on a carnival-like stage of glowing colored lights. They give birth to mysterious visages, erotically loaded and sewn to fit the artist’s own face. Levisse leaves us to wonder if upon wearing one we might be consumed by it, relinquishing our individual selves to the spirit within.