

Bruno GADENNE
Tropical Insomnia

2022.7.26 – 8.23
DUMONTEIL
Bldg.105 Yong Ping Lane 199 Hengshan Rd. Shanghai

DUMONTEIL Shanghai is pleased to present "Tropical Insomnia", French artist Bruno GADENNE's first solo exhibition in China, featuring a series of nocturnal scenes created after a 3 months trip in Central America. The artist invites us to reconsider the relationship between man and nature in the digital age and to experience the mysterious and magical beauty of nature through his research-expedition-based work.

December 2nd, 2019. Belize
Still no jaguar in sight, but I can feel I'm being watched.

Travel Diary, B.Gadenne

Marching in the footsteps of Gauguin, Delacroix, Sargent and so many others, Bruno Gadenne renews the long tradition of the travelling painter. In the winter of 2019, he retraced the itinerary of explorers Stephens and Catherwood deep into the jungle of Honduras and Guatemala, who re-discovered many lost Mayan cities and temples. Travelling very light but for a small backpack filled with gouache painting materials, a machete and a hammock, B. Gadenne collected images of the primary forest that helped him create large-scale oil paintings once back in his Parisian studio.

«To track is a shamanic phenomenon : a kind of spiritual displacement into the body of the animal»
Sur la piste animale, Baptiste Morizot

As in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's movie *Tropical Malady*, which the title of the exhibition is directly paying homage to, we follow our protagonist, here painter Bruno Gadenne, deep into the jungle where he experiences near-mystical encounters, the tiger of the movie replaced here by the always-out-of-sight jaguar. Traces of wild animals are directly visible as in "*The path*", where the spectator is invited to follow the prints of a large jaguar, leading us ever deeper into the dark and lush vegetation.

The landscape depicted here is indeed sparsely inhabited: a couple of figures, the human shown as another animal in its natural habitat. In "*The Watch*", the figure (a self portrait since the artist, travelling solo, is his own model) is looking straight at us, spying behind a floating log, watching over his territory. He seems at the same time threatening, and ready to disappear under the muddy waters. But even in the figureless landscapes, a lingering presence can be sensed, emanating from the layers of oil painting, behind the numerous brushstrokes rendering the leaves. The trees themselves become protagonists of the scenes, an ominous face-to-face in the heart of the jungle, far from any civilization but for the ruins of Mayan pyramids. The wall of trees is hiding something, at the same time inviting and menacing.

January 7th, 2020. Guatemala
Today I visited the caves in the cliffs above the Rio Dulce. I covered myself in mineral-rich mud, and spent an hour floating in the warm water of the natural hot springs under a fine rain.
Everything is very quiet.

Travel Diary, B. Gadenne

Peaceful scenes like "*The Prince's Waterfall*" depicting a deer at a pond invite us to a silent contemplation, for fear of breaking the spell of this calm apparition. In his paintings, the artist often pulls the attention from the figures back to the landscapes through his use of contrast in the lights and colors, and the dense rendition of plants and water, our gaze always going back and forth between the figures and the landscape they are part of. The fog in the painting "*The Queens*" adds mystery to the elegantly crowned tree-ferns, hovering above the undergrowth of the misty forest.

February 3rd, 2020. Honduras

The path keeps going up for more than one hour, it's exhausting. Beautiful waterfalls cross the path here and there. Half the trek is done within a cloud here on top of the forested mountain, creating a strange atmosphere in the jungle, blurring its vines, its palm trees, its ferns.

Travel Diary, B. Gadenne

The rendering of light in Gadenne's painting is often intriguing. We can not really tell what time of day or night it is: the scenes are shrouded in a bluish wash, when it's not altogether an intriguing blood-red atmosphere like a cosmic anomaly, part apocalyptic, part redemption. These distinctive tones are critical to the 'mood' of each work. They are achieved by the artist's unconventional use of the glazing technique—a highly developed painting technique in the Renaissance era—to play with the optics of our eyes.

‘One has to hope that a diplomat gone into the woods to meet other living creatures [...] comes back transformed, calmly feral, far from the whimsical savagery attributed to others. That the one who let himself run wild with them comes back a little bit different from his “were-travel”[like a werewolf]: a mixed-blood, straddling between two worlds. Nor sinful nor purified, just other and capable of slightly travelling between the worlds, and trying to get them to communicate, in order to implement a common world.’

Sur la piste animale, Baptiste Morizot

Bruno Gadenne is a “diplomat”, as coined by philosopher/tracker Baptiste Morizot: an ambassador of the tropical forests to the city dwellers, someone trying to bridge the gap between the artificial world of humans and the wildness of the animal one. Through his travels and the resulting paintings, the artist acts as a contemporary shaman, bringing the sights of primeval forests back into our busy cities. Questioning our relationship with Nature, he leads us back not at the center but as a part of the grand scheme of the natural world.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bruno Gadenne (b. 1990 in Cavaillon) is an artist who lives and works in Paris. After studying in Paris and Boston (SMFA), he graduated from HEAR (Haute École des Arts du Rhin) in Strasbourg in 2014, under the mentorship of painter Daniel Schlier.

His first solo show was in Strasbourg in 2014. Since then, his work has been exhibited in galleries and art centers in France and United States. Highlighted by the November International Painting Prize exhibitions in Vitry in 2016 and then that of the Icart Prize 2017, Bruno Gadenne is the winner of the Théophile Schuler Prize in 2018. In 2019, after being the guest of honor at the Salon des Artistes de Massy, he had his first solo show in the United States, at the agnès b. Gallery in New York City.

Gadenne's work relates to landscape and nature, inspired by his month-long research expeditions around the world, using sketches and digital images as basis for his artworks. Using oil paint, he creates a strangeness by diverting some of the landscape features. He tries to create a tension by playing with the rendering of light and the deepness of transparent layers, establishing a double play between wonder and an uncanny feeling. His ambitious intention is to capture the viewer's attention, to invite the spectator to contemplate while being on the alert of an underlying menace hiding in tranquility.