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Par Maud de la Forterie

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JULIETTE MINCHIN
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Juliette Minchin développe une œuvre puissamment évocative, nourrie de croyances et de rites qui prend la forme d'installations, de sculptures et de dessins en Italie, France, et ailleurs. Une exposition pissenlit conjointement organisée, du 21 août au 22 septembre 2024, par les galeries Anne Sarah Bénichou et Natalie Seroussi au Palais de la Ville de Paris.

Juliette Minchin utilise le cire comme un matériau évanescent et éphémère, tout comme la religion. Elle crée des installations, des sculptures et des dessins en Italie, France, et ailleurs. Une exposition pissenlit conjointement organisée, du 21 août au 22 septembre 2024, par les galeries Anne Sarah Bénichou et Natalie Seroussi au Palais de la Ville de Paris.

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Juliette Minchin's work is powerfully evocative, inspired by beliefs and rituals, and takes the form of installations, sculptures and drawings. In addition to *Rivelazioni*, on view until October 27th, 2024 at the Museo Sant'Orsola in Florence, the artist is taking part in *Hasards exquis. Une exposition pissenlit* jointly organised in Paris from August 21st to September 22nd, 2024, by the Anne-Sarah Bénichou and Natalie Seroussi galleries, echoing the *Surrealism* exhibition at the Centre Pompidou.

Juliette Minchin uses wax as a medium of choice for expressing ephemerality and regeneration. Graduated from the Ecole nationale supérieure des arts décoratifs in scenography and the Beaux-Arts de Paris, Minchin's work has a strong theatrical quality, in which malleable wax is transformed into sumptuous veils and spectacular draperies. With a gestural style akin to performance art, she also works with raw, natural materials—earth and pigments—which give her works, particularly her drawings, an organic dimension, as an aid to the living. Juliette Minchin is fascinated by anthropological stories, and her work focuses on rituals designed to ward off fate in a desire for protection. The artist is interested in the way in which human beings live out their fears and beliefs, whether religious or not, in the face of death. Her work draws on ancestral cultures and traditions to such an extent that her sculptures and installations,

conceived as fictitious spaces and places of ritual with a certain universality, are a syncretism in which popular culture and vernacular art are given free rein to flourish. Notions of mystery and the sacred permeate her works, whose steel structures form the backbone and the volumetry of her draperies in a flesh colour, slightly pinkish, reminiscent of the sculpted marbles of Antiquity and that of the Baroque. All resonate with the historical significance of the architecture in which they are set, a palace in Palermo (*De cinere surgo* at the Palazzo Costantino in 2022) or at the Monnaie de Paris.

EVOLVING WORKS
Winner of the Mondes Nouveaux creative support programme in 2023, she worked at the heart of the Cistercian site at Beaulieu-en-Rouergue. *La Croix, veillée aux épinets*, a monumental installation in the shape of a Latin cross, was placed at the crossroads of the transept and the nave of the abbatial church, with its pared-down architecture. It followed the plan of the building: 28 m long and made up of 33 openwork steel panels, its presence made the air and the light vibrate, in keeping with the spirituality of the site. Like a huge candle, hundreds of tiny flames consumed the wax, gradually revealing the metal structure, a lacework with plant motifs. In these evolving works, time is the driving force, ticking away, and each creation becomes



a series of "autonomous temporal sequences" in the words of Juliette Minchin, who "lets the full latitude of time in her material. She seems to suspend it when the wax plate freezes into fragile draperies, whose astonishing sensuality is particularly striking. She exploits impermanence and the cycle of transformation, right down to the pure liquefaction. Like the Tibetan labyrinth, the Mandala, matter is consumed, disappears, then is reborn in another state. The artist is particularly interested in entropy and concepts related to the passage of time. At the end of each exhibition, the wax is recovered, filtered and then reactivated in subsequent works, like a soul leaving one body to become incarnate in another. Inspired by a Sicilian candle factory, Juliette Minchin has adapted the *plugging* technique, by which the wicks of the candles are covered in wax and cooled. Patient and meticulous, her gestures and interventions are part of a repetition that perpetuates immemorial techniques and vanished rites. In her veils and drapes there is a tension between strength and fragility, heaviness and lightness, but also between the living and the petrified. Seized in full movement, their immobility reveals a world as if fossilised, stuck in a time that we can't date, a reminiscence that seems to point towards eternity. Embodied in a precarious equilibrium that resembles a sensitive staging of the ephemeral, this tension of opposing forces updates the age-old genre of the veils, so much so that her works call for intimate experience and contemplation, making us feel the silence as well as the passage of time. For her exhibition *Rivelazioni*, currently on show at the Museo Sant'Orsola, a 14th-century monastery in Florence's historic San Lorenzo district, Juliette Minchin has created an installation in the convent's first church that unfolds around the remains uncovered during the latest archaeological digs, including the tomb of Lisa Gherardini, the hypothetical model for *Mona Lisa*. Like stained-glass windows, its wax veils veiled and envelop the architecture: the back of the space and the windows come alive with transparencies as if crossed by a new breath of life, resurrecting the theatrical and fleeting Baroque past of the convent, of which there has been no talk since the 19th century. In the former apothecary or pharmacy, the artist has staged a vigil. Around the room's imposing pillars, Juliette Minchin has hung her panels covered in wax and wicks, a reference to the liturgical and healing rituals once practised here. ■

Maud de la Forterie is a journalist and art critic.
Rivelazioni, 2024. Vue de l'exposition vénéral Museo Sant'Orsola, Florence. © Cræstudio (Italy)