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Par Merve Akar Akgün

## The tension in what we see

French artist Mireille Blanc's solo exhibition *Far from Pictures*, which proposes to take us "far from images", continues at THE PILL. We spoke to Mireille Blanc about this exhibition, in which ordinary moments of everyday life are brought to life with new representations



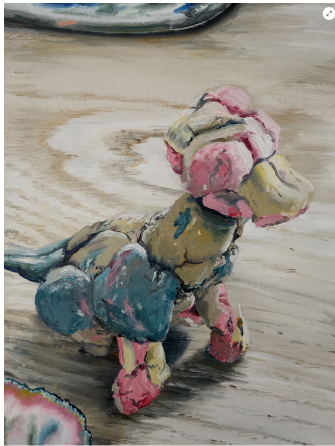
Mireille Blanc, Photo: Andres Donadio

**You are renowned for your distinctive technique in which you use found photos as a starting point, which you reinterpret with delicate brushstrokes and a subtle color palette. Your work creates an effect of blur and fragmentation while bringing a dreamlike, introspective dimension to everyday scenes. What fascinates you about everyday life? How did your practice come to this point?**

I'm interested in the enigmatic aspect of things; how the familiar, the everyday, even the banal, can suddenly become strange. My painting is all about the way things appear. This is what fascinates me about everyday life: How, suddenly, reality slips away and appears different, as if "unseen"? It's the phenomenon of reduction (in phenomenology) - which fascinated me when I was an art student: when things lose their substance and acquire a new one. What surrounds us can then be an inexhaustible subject for a painter! I've always worked from photographs. And everyday life, and a form of banality, and therefore of truth, has always been part of my preoccupations...

**You explore themes of memory, perception and reality by working with blurred or damaged photographs. How do you relate to the past?**

There's an immediate memory in my work, linked to the things I photograph on a daily basis. But there's also a strong link to the past, a more distant memory, when I rework old photographs, decades old, from which I extract details and fragments. The relationship to the past is also expressed formally through desaturation, with colors tending towards gray and white, where things are sometimes prey to disappearance (when the flash, for example, eats away at the photograph). I'd say it's more a kind of common past that I'm looking for than something personal - and so each viewer can find familiar subjects, objects from memory...



Mirelle Blanc, Dog, 2022, 49 x 55 cm

**In your exhibition *Far From the Pictures*, you present paintings that reproduce not the subjects of the photographs, but the photographs themselves with their imperfections. Can you explain how this artistic choice enriches your exploration of the themes of memory and sensation?**

I like to create a tension in what we see: I'm keen for the images to be restrained, so that not everything is immediately apparent. For me, this is one of the challenges of painting: the time it takes to come into view. This time is specific to painting itself...

My work comes from an encounter with an existing object or photograph. I then photograph this object, or this photo (I specify that the photos I find come from family albums, personal or otherwise - I never look for images on the Internet, I wouldn't know WHAT to look for). I then proceed by successive distancing. I reframe, remove details, blur and distort my image. I exhaust my subject, making it no longer obvious. I push this feeling of strangeness that I initially had. I paint from these documents, making all these filters visible. It's the status of the image that interests me; it's a question of painting the reproduction of an image, the document itself, taped to the studio wall, the reworked photograph, with a thick, dense paste. All marks are thus made visible: the tape used for cropping, traces of light (the flash that re-injects light when a photograph is photographed), paint stains, water stains, 'accidents' in the studio, folds, which occur on printed images... This tends to distance my subjects, and creates a tension, in this gap between subject and viewer.



Mirelle Blanc, Oeufs, 2023, 20 x 15 cm

**Ordinary objects or scenes are transformed in your paintings. In the same way that Andy Warhol brought a whole new approach to ordinary objects, you too unveil the magic of everyday scenes while making them complex and intriguing... How do you choose the subjects or images you decide to transform into paint? Is there a personal story behind some of your work?**

The subjects impose themselves on me - it's always a matter of chance. There's a great deal of intuition involved in choosing subjects. And there has to be a need to paint an image. My painting tends towards a certain form of abstraction - I like to speak of "countered figuration". The subjects remain uncertain, sometimes struggling to emerge - when, in other paintings, they are immediately identifiable (it's then their improbability that interests me... the fact that something escapes).

There are often personal stories behind my paintings, since many of the objects come from my direct environment, but I find it interesting that they are not necessarily told, so that the canvases remain "open" to viewers, so that everyone can find echoes of their own lives and memories.



Mireille Blanc, Sweat, 2023, Iris, 2023, 40 x 28 cm; Yet, 2023, 160 x 125 cm; Studio, 2022, 60 x 48 cm; Refrain, 2023, 20 x 15 cm; Figurine, 2023, 200 x 150 cm

**Your paintings often have a strong emotional resonance and can evoke personal memories in the viewer, creating a powerful and intimate connection with your audience. How do different venues influence your work, especially in Istanbul?**

I find it interesting to decontextualize my work, to confront it with other views, to see what its reception will be in other places, other contexts (than France, and Paris where I work). Istanbul is a city full of contrasts, inspiring - I've been there several times - with its mix of tradition and modernity. I was particularly touched by the atmosphere of the city, the lively, vibrant atmosphere that emanates from it. All this nourishes and permeates my painting.



Mireille Blanc, Planche 2 - A.W., 50 x 40, 2018

**Aby Warburg plays a central role in your exhibition, in dialogue with AW's work and his *Atlas Mnemosyne*. How does Aby Warburg's methodology and his concept of the iconology of the interval influence your creative process and the way you perceive the relationship between painting and photography?**

When I discovered the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, and the scope of Aby Warburg's research, I was fascinated. By studying images, their analogies, echoes and correspondences, Aby Warburg tried to think of a history of gestures, of the persistence of human movements. Epochs, styles and forms collide on the Atlas plates, constellations of images, drawing new relationships, new lines of knowledge, both improbable and obvious. A whole process of image memory is thus exposed. I like to think of my painting in terms of clues, constellations, resurgences of motifs and recurring subjects, without hierarchy, as Aby Warburg did. In my painting, I work against the idea of ONE subject - not in series either. But there are recurrences, which I realize a posteriori. I also think that as an artist, you revolve around the same idea all your life...

*Plate 2 - A.W.*, a painting after Aby Warburg's plate, which opens and closes the exhibition, is programmatic of the links, connections and formal rebounds between the paintings in the show.