

# Albert Baronian

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Tuesday > Saturday – 12:00 > 6:00 pm

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## Press Release

### « OLD MASTERS », Oriol Vilanova

**Exhibition from 10 November until 23 December 2017**

**Opening Thursday 09 November, 6-9pm**

*Albert Baronian invites Oriol Vilanova to exhibit alongside Gilbert & George. While these artists have all used postcards in their respective works, the juxtaposition also finds its rationale in their common interest in collecting.*

Oriol Vilanova has built his practice around the compiling of a motley collection of postcards that he hand-picks on flea markets, seldom in museum stores, according to preferences that he himself doesn't understand at the time of purchase. « *The image chooses me* » as he puts it, likening his approach to that of the readymade. Currently, his collection of raw materials includes several tens of thousands of postcards, the exact number of which needs to be revised upwards almost daily as, each time I meet Oriol on the Place du Jeu de Balle, he takes a small stack of cards out of his jacket pocket and we examine them one by one. Upon returning to his apartment, he methodically stores the postcards in binders. Most of them are filed in plastic folders labeled « rare – unclassified », a title that deserves attention. Although these postcards are typically printed in high numbers, each postcard is treated as if it were rare. Each postcard is unique even if the collection includes multiple versions of the same image. The postcard was hand-picked and carries a story of travel and feelings and sometimes a written text for an addressee. Moreover, each specific image can bring to mind the different stages of reproduction, the variety of printing processes, layouts and captions. While the label « unclassified » may seem at odds with classification, it finds its meaning in the second stage of the procedure. Among the various materials collected, the artist finds thematic or formal connections. He defines precise groupings and outlines recurring aspects that are specific to the « type » of postcard at hand or that are indicative of his personal interests. His whole studio fits on a couple of shelves because his approach is mainly cerebral. But the process he develops depends on another crucial step, a step that is as physical as it is conceptual : how to showcase a collection? Oriol Vilanova's answers to this fundamental question are as varied as the parameters of the exhibition spaces he occupies. The solutions he comes up with are inspired by the conventions used by museums and shops, by the domestic habits of presenting and storing objects, or by the architectural configuration of the space – as he did, for example, in the exceptional scenography he staged for his entire collection at the Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona. His methods of showcasing his collection interact with the specific spatial, temporal and cultural contexts.

In order to ease the visitor's transition from one space of the Albert Baronian Gallery to the other across the street, the artist has imagined a transportable device that is at once pragmatic and poetic: three worker's jackets whose pockets are filled with postcards of three great painters' works thereby providing the visitor with no less than retrospectives of three old masters. The outfits enable the viewers to delve into reproductions of works by Henri Rousseau, James Ensor and Francisco de Goya. This device echoes the artist's daily life as a collector and his performance titled *Rousseau's*, which he performed in Amsterdam

(for the Playtime Festival, at Le Salon's invitation). It is also reminiscent of the publication *Not without me*, that consists in giving the role to the buyer (« Protocole » project initiated by Christophe Veys).

In this exhibition, if the artist takes the « guise » of the curator of a « Museum without walls » in line with the concept expressed by André Malraux, – all the while paying attention to the lay-out of the space... – the mediation of the exhibition is once again entrusted to someone else, this time to the gallery owner. In tailoring his choice of clothing to the setting, the artist seems to be playfully adding to Nicolas de Larmessin's collection of etchings depicting the attire of different guilds and titled *Costumes grotesques* (17<sup>th</sup> century). The word « collection » that also describes Oriol Villanova's practice alludes to fashion design, and the context of his intervention once again inspired his choices. He explains his sartorial choice as a desire to create a link with Gilbert & George's conventional suits and with Albert Baronian's taste for vividly coloured outfits!

This being said, he opted for worker's jackets... A daring choice for an artist who claims that every day is like a Sunday! A way, perhaps, to express the delegation of the exhibit's mediation to the gallery owner? Or might this be a subtle allusion to early 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, who, with a tinge of admiration and condescension, thought of le Douanier Rousseau as a « Sunday painter »? One could understand Oriol Vilanova's predilection for le Douanier Rousseau in light of this expression... But I will let you establish your own links (some obvious, some less so) between the realm of these old masters' imaginations through your own visual observations.

In other words, seeing their masterpieces in postcard form is a way for us all to preserve and to share the memory of paintings we see in museums, the demand for these reproductions is still going strong in our digital era. For don't we all have pocket versions of our imaginary museums, which we may consult without using white gloves? Oriol Vilanova's gesture is neither nostalgic nor irreverent ; however, I wondered *in petto* whether the title he gave to his show wasn't also a tribute to its context...

Catherine Mayeur

P.S.: I don't wish to divulge anything more about the three retrospectives staged by the artist, although I'd like to draw your attention to Pierre Loti's cat who is portrayed cuddling in his elderly master's pocket during a photo shoot for the invitation to the exhibition.