

Baronian Xippas

Press release

Charles-Henry Sommelette

Off Road

33 Rue de la Concorde

11.06-17.07.2021

Opening

Thursday 10.06.2021
from 6 - 9 pm

Charles-Henry Sommelette

Off Road

Albert Baronian and Renos Xippas are proud to present *Off Road*, the very first solo exhibition of the Belgian artist Charles-Henry Sommelette (born in Liège in 1984) at the Baronian Xippas gallery in Brussels. The show will consist of a brand-new series of black-and-white charcoal and lead pencil landscape drawings on paper and on canvas.

“Intimacy and silence – that is what grips me.”

Charles-Henry Sommelette, 2017

Charles-Henry Sommelette, winner of the 2017 Prix du Luxembourg, lives and works in Barvaux, in the shade of a garden he tirelessly cultivates – sometimes with dense and dark strokes of charcoal, sketching eye-catching, frozen landscapes against the vast white background of paper, sometimes with small oil paintings, drawing our eyes to the dominant greens, softly and without any kind of coercion. In both cases, Sommelette’s technique is remarkable. Both present themselves to us as unified wholes, framed in such a precise and carefully designed manner evocative of a photo shoot.

The more we immerse ourselves in these compositions, the more the world seems to come to a standstill, suspended in time. Our existence flows and ripples in the air just like the wind blows through the treetops. Absence is a negative presence and our eyes sense this. Although these familiar landscapes with their indefinable atmosphere appear to be deserted by humans, they are certainly inhabited by a strange vibration. Whether our eyes are drawn to the shades of grey running across the paper or whether we immerse ourselves in the different greens that shimmer on the canvas, our perception is silently pulled towards other gardens – interior gardens and gardens of the past.

For what we perceive to be a landscape is a suspended perception of moving images that we have formed inside our minds. Or as the philosopher Alain Roger highlights in his *Court traité du paysage* (Gallimard, 1997), what we perceive to be a landscape are simply images of landscapes we have seen, which make us recognise it as such. Our perception is formed by a visual repertory of stored images and we only see the world around us through this specific filter.

This applies even more to the subject of landscapes, an aspect of the world that has been assimilated by art history and turned into an archetype. Although this topic is one of the most rehashed concepts in painting, Henry Sommelette adopts a brand-new approach to it, turning it into a unique object in his own world of magical realism, which fills our hearts with a sweet melancholy.

Each garden suggests a different world in one way or another. Charles-Henry Sommelette offers a view of a world that has been revisited a thousand times, but his version is a green, silent, cloudy and disturbing world – a surreal world at the edge of reality. An unsettling world, too, despite its calm appearance.

We all know that death frequently takes on the misleading appearance of life in our society. The same can be said about our gardens. We cut, adorn, maintain and mow them. We fence them in. This creates a peaceful and harmonious image which is undoubtedly nothing more than a sweet illusion if you consider that they are the result of the furious and progressive destruction of nature.

Viewer, beware of the sweetness of things.

Text by François de Coninck, 2018

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Charles-Henry Sommelette (b. 1984, Liège) lives and works in Barvaux-sur-Ourthe in Belgium. He received his post-graduate degree in plastic, visual and spatial arts at École Supérieure des Arts de la Ville de Liège and his Master in visual arts at Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts de Liège. Recent solo exhibitions include *Prix découverte 2020*, Centre d'Art de Rouge Cloître, Auderghem (2021), *Tracés de l'absence*, Espace 251 Nord, Liège (2016), *Espace jeune artiste*, Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC), Liège (2010). He recently figured in the following group exhibitions : *En Piste !*, La Boverie, Liège (2019), *Jardins des contes*, L'Orangerie, espace d'art contemporain, Bastogne (2018), *Prix Jeune Création*, Beaux-Arts de Paris, Paris (2018) and *Paysage de Belgique*, Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels (2015).