



CLEARING

Loïc Raguénès
Les animaux bleus

&

There are tears at the heart of things

November 9 — December 22, 2023

Les animaux bleus and *There are tears at the heart of things* mark the two first posthumous exhibitions of French artist Loïc Raguénès (1968-2022) at CLEARING, Brussels showing works situated at the chronological extremities of his output, and which reflect the consistency of his artistic intentions.

Loïc Raguénès' works—from his mid-2000s “neo-pointillist” pencil drawings, via hazy spheres painted on fog-laden backgrounds, to his abstract-figurative seascapes, all unfolded in chapters—have long acted as clues and gestures towards his innermost artistic questionings rather than a clear resolution or statement. His oeuvre, like the waves he so often depicted while posted in his Douarnenez studio on the northwest coast of France, is a perpetual ebb and flow between abstraction and figuration. A constant coming and going between the microcosm of texture and detail to the macrocosm of shapes, colour and lines, with an interest in the tipping point between the two.

Les animaux bleus, in the front space of the gallery, comprises 28 early drawings of animals that Raguénès sketched from life at the zoo whilst a student at the Besançon Art Academy. Lion, tiger, giraffe, baboon, birds: each animal is foregrounded in black outline and blue-grey pastel shading while their background consists of a textured, painterly white-out. Rather than a bestiary or a series of zoological illustrations, the young Loïc Raguénès was already brewing his formula for creating works which would explore the question of representation, abstraction, and figuration, as well as the idea of hierarchies regarding painterly subject matter. The restrained palette also acts as a prelude to Raguénès' lifelong affair with hues of blue and grey which he employed consistently throughout his oeuvre.

In the main space, moving forward several decades, *There are tears at the heart of things* gathers a selection of the artist's late works. A central in-situ painting, first executed in 2012, sees pink and blue dots placed across the entire rear wall. Using a template to outline the hundreds of circles, the work emerges from a meditative process that, despite the use of a cardboard cut-out guide, allows for spontaneity and chance. The modernist desire for order and rationalisation is flouted, the grid is atomised, and the circles are almost no longer incessantly self-referential. The work marks a transition away from his earlier compositions which employed strictly placed Benday dots and rasterised images towards a more freeform and painterly approach. It is no coincidence then that a similar pattern blurs our vision, superimposed upon the exhibition's seascapes: rain, snow, or an afterimage having stared at Raguénès' ever-present dots for too long?

The framed works lining the gallery walls constitute a suite of gouache squares on paper which continue the artist's dalliances with suprematist monochromes, the idea of the image as an icon, and seriality. Whereas in previous iterations of the works titles evoked fields viewed from above, it would seem perspective has here been shifted 180 degrees to gaze out into the aether, as the compositions tend to vibrate and gravitate, like planets, around a certain point. Across the whole series, a black square is recurrent, akin to a repeated musical theme. A preamble note to Eric Satie's 1893 piece “Vexations” reads: “*In order to play the theme 840 times in succession, it would be advisable to prepare oneself beforehand, and in the deepest silence, by serious immobilities,*” advice that also seems appropriate when apprehending Raguénès' seriality.

Another motif that the artist had been revisiting for some time is that of the cave. The three works to the rear of the gallery reveal Loïc Raguénès' interest for Gustave Courbet who painted several works representing the source of the Loue River (*La Source de La Loue*). Drawing on his native landscapes, Courbet's paintings (like

those of Raguénès) form an ensemble depicting the same theme taken from different angles, culminating at the threshold of abstraction as a medley of greys and browns bordering the cave's deep black mouth. Should we approach these works from another perspective, it seems the horizontal green and blue lines from Raguénès' wave paintings are grasped, compressed and bent into semi-circles or monochromatic rainbows that neatly espouse a mysterious black hole.

Loïc Raguénès approached his practice with a restrained yet textured vocabulary of forms, colours, and techniques which he constantly re-explored or revisited. Inspired by his immediate surroundings (animals, sea, weather, planets), his practice involved a perpetual reshuffling of the deck of cards he had dealt himself. Each new chapter is birthed from an element of a previous one; a drop of distillate pipetted from one into the ocean of the next. Two tempera paintings on canvas bear witness to this methodology as well as the new directions he was intent on taking. Originating in the outlines lifted from blueprints, these two works constitute a geometrical resolution of other marine-related objects visible from the artist's studio; sailboats.

Finally, amidst the chorus of works which crossfade elegantly between abstraction and figuration are several representational outbursts. Like a return to a foundation or a resistance to total rationalisation, a man in a red sweater, a sheep, and a lone goose not only gesture back towards the series of blue animals, but act as cryptic clues in an effort to understand where Loïc Raguénès may have navigated to next.

Les animaux bleus and *There are tears at the heart of things* will be followed by a presentation of the artist's works at our New York space in late November.

Loïc Raguénès (1968, Besançon – 2022, Douarnenez) lived and worked in Douarnenez, FR.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Musée des Beaux Arts, Dole; La Salle de bains, Lyon; 40mcube, Rennes; Centre d'art image/imatge, Orthez; Musée François Pompon, Saulieu; Circuit, Lausanne; Galeria Zero, Milan; Patrick de Brock, Knokke; and C L E A R I N G New York and Brussels.

His work has been featured in group exhibitions at Le Consortium, Dijon; de Appel, Amsterdam; Musée des Beaux Arts de Rennes; Villa Arson, Nice; Casino Luxembourg; FRAC Ile de France, Aquitaine, Bordeaux, Languedoc-Roussillon; Centre d'art contemporain la Synagogue de Delme; Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris; Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, Brussels; Various Small Fires, Seoul; Casey Kaplan, New York; Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Salzburg, and David Zwirner.

The artist will be part of the 9th Biennial of Painting at the Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in 2024.

Loïc Raguénès's work is part of the collections of Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Le Consortium, Dijon; Fonds national d'art contemporain, Paris; FRAC, Ile de France; Bourgogne; Champagne-Ardenne; Corse; Franche-Comté; Nouvelle-Aquitaine; Occitanie Montpellier and Toulouse.