

le mythe de la pente douce

by Arpaïs Du Bois



Opening: Saturday, Feb. 11th 2023, from 2 to 6 pm, in the presence of the artist
Show: February 14th - April 8th 2023

In her new solo exhibition at Gallery FIFTY ONE, Arpaïs Du Bois (°1973, lives and works in Antwerp) further explores the themes that are close to her heart, namely the political, social and ecological challenges of our time. In addition to recent works on paper, the artist shows three-dimensional work for the first time in a long while. All this is brought together in an elaborate scenography that has a profound impact on the exhibition space, which is an important research component in her recent exhibitions.

If a myth is a story or discourse that stages collective fantasies, then the title of this exhibition (loosely translated: the myth of the gentle slope) puts the finger on several sore spots. In light of the political, societal and climatological disasters that await us, according to Du Bois we are all too easily soothed with words about belief in a.o. how technology will offer us a way out, goodwill and the democratic values that will continue to prevail. We fool ourselves and are made to believe that as long as we try hard enough, the tide can still be turned. However, according to the artist, these are delusions; myths that allow us to continue our activities without a radical change.

In the scenography of this exhibition, Du Bois sets to work with the slope from the title. In her opinion, this one is anything but gentle. On the contrary; we have reached a slippery steepness with catastrophic consequences. Du Bois translates this visually by obstructing and converting part of the staircase. Once downstairs you bump into thorns, bronze wall objects. Or do they encounter you? In the main exhibition space, a long, sloping bench along the exhibited works lets the visitor experience that even a moderate inclination can already be very uncomfortable and demands attention.

Du Bois has a daily drawing practice. She works incessantly, compulsively, and it is important for her to show that abundance of work. Also in the case of this exhibition, in which all works reinforce and balance each other. The works on paper have clearly become more layered, both content related as in terms of texture and materiality. Du Bois shows her audience every nuance of her thinking process and several facets of a reality are given a place; she questions, denies, hopes, smiles. And there is also room for some serious introspection.

In Du Bois' characteristic manner, the tone of the title is extended in the individual works on view. Look for example at 'ambiance florale fanée'; a state of the world. In a critical description, which is typical for her oeuvre, Du Bois refers to a floral atmosphere in which the flowers, however, have withered. By constantly repeating, reworking and repainting vegetal motifs, they have evolved into abstracted forms from which the beauty, poetry and complexity of nature have disappeared. In 'subversifs aux heures creuses' - being subversive in your free time, when it suits you - Du Bois raises the question of individual and collective responsibility.

Although the message is often heavy, Du Bois's soft colour palette and shapes and her exquisite play with the French language, also leave room for lightness, beauty, compassion and empathic humour. Because - in absence of direct means and actions to really transform the world into a livable place for people, animals and plants in the long term - what do we do or can we do other than 'bricoler son monde' and 'bégayer la détresse'? We will 'fatiguer l'enfer' and we will continue to work, cure, pay attention, care for and make better. As good as we can. Or not.

This exhibition is accompanied by a new FIFTY ONE Publication, which is a collection of Du Bois' work from the past year. The title, 'lustrer nos épines', sounds both combative and dark, as if we could only stand in the defense. But this always with an almost lustful note.