

17.09. – 17.12.2023

# LE MATIN

Caroline Bachmann

Curators:

Claire Hoffmann et Claire Le Restif

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN  
D'IVRY – LE CRÉDAC  
La Manufacture des Œillets 1, place  
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Free admission

Wednesday to Friday : 14:00-18:00  
Week-end : 14:00-19:00  
Closed on public holidays  
Métro 7, Mairie d'Ivry  
RER C, Ivry-sur-Seine  
Vélib', station n°42021 Raspail -  
Manufacture des Œillets

CENTRE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN  
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d'Île-de-France.

Caroline Bachmann's exhibition is  
produced in partnership with the Centre  
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# ÉDITORIAL

In dialogue with Claire Hoffmann, curator responsible for visual arts at the Centre culturel suisse, and artist Caroline Bachmann, we have conceived *Le matin*, the artist's first solo exhibition in France.

Since 2013, Caroline Bachmann has been exploring figurative painting, drawing on her conceptual artistic practice as well as her research into Marcel Duchamp in collaboration with artist and art historian Stefan Banz (1961-2021). Portraits, flowers and landscapes - all classic subjects of 19th-century European painting - question notions of perception, memory and time. This monograph, spread over three rooms at Crédac, offers a comprehensive view of the artist's practice, including a series of rarely exhibited preparatory drawings. To complete the ensemble, Caroline Bachmann shares a selection of paintings by American artist Louis Michel Eilshemius (1864-1941) from her personal collection, on which her work is based.

Claire Le Restif

# LE MATIN

Whether we're children or adults, we've all played at finding shapes in the clouds or in the surrounding landscape. This playful activity pushes us towards the momentary abstraction of a concrete form in order to transform it into another recognizable figure (a castle, a shooting star, a part of the human body). The cloud, the hill or the mountain, float in a perception that is both a part of the reality that surrounds us and, at the same time, a part of an inner reality that, while specific to us, can be the object of a shared, even universal, experience.

## Interviews with Caroline Bachman by Claire Hoffmann and Claire Le Restif between October 2022 and July 2023.

*CH/CLR : In the last catalogue of your work, you said that you don't want to give too much importance to the subject. Is that one of the reasons why you've chosen to do variations on classical 19th-century themes in painting - portraits, landscapes, still lifes - as can be seen in your exhibition at the Crédac?*

**CB :** In 2013, I decided to take the plunge and forget a lot of things that were polluting my mind. It's not hard to choose a subject and represent it. I wanted to express something that's not visible in

the subject, because, after all, that's what painting is about. I felt trapped by its meaning and lots of intellectual issues that stood in the way of expression and discovery. So I abandoned the subject.

I started by painting a series of portraits of eight visionary American painters, born in the 19th century, whom my work is based on. First of all, Louis Michel Eilshemius (1864-1941) - some of his paintings from my collection are on view in the Crédac show. Winslow Homer (1836-1910), Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917), Ralph Albert Blakelock (1847-1919), Marsden Hartley (1877-1943), Joseph Stella (1877-1946), Arthur Dove (1880-1946) and Milton Avery (1885-1965) were all a bit exotic to me, geographically and temporally, and that distance allowed me to position myself in relation to their practice.

After seeing a 20th-century Swiss painting show, I did a series of portraits of women artists that's also shown at the Crédac. I was shocked by the absence of women in the portraits and self-portraits hung in the museum's first room. My series bears witness to the fact that my contemporaries actually exist.

I also began a series of paintings of cut flowers, which for me signify celebration and gifts, since all of these flowers were presents.

*CH/CLR : What paintings first particularly attracted you?*

CB : Pierre Bonnard (1867-1947). I first saw his work when I was young and it blew me away. There's nothing illustrative about it. That absence of narration felt right to me.

I have also been very influenced by Swiss concrete art. That relationship with Minimalism has structured my work. My parents were architects, fans of Le Corbusier. I was brought up in an atmosphere of rationalisation and non-decoration. I share that taste for the slightly Zen side of that modernism. I really like it. At the same time I counterbalance that with my frames that are a bit Art Nouveau, slightly bizarre, like little provocations. There's always that kind of radicalism. Things should be intrinsically what they are and nothing else.

When I first began to think about painting, I felt caught between these two apparently contradictory influences, a fascination with pure form, subtle and non-decorative visual solutions, and the sensuous painting of Bonnard, for example

*CH/CLR : As opposed "less is more"?*

CB : Right. I've struggled against that, like with the mountains. On the one hand it really attracted me, and on the other there was something unsatisfactory about it. I wanted something riskier. A few years ago, painting like mine would have been unthinkable!

*CH/CLR : When you decide to go back to painting, you kept your conceptual approach. For you, painting is an object, not a subject.*

CB : I think painting is a language. For a writer, a poem is not just a piece of paper with ink on it. The use of form and colour produces a very specific relationship with a moment or the world. I don't want

people to look a painting as if it were an object, and I also don't want them to look at it as an illustration of an idea.

*CH/CLR : Looking out through a window in your home, you make quick preparatory sketches of the landscape around Lake Geneva. Then you make a painting in your studio in Cully or Berlin, places with absolutely no lake views. How does this passage from drawing to painting work?*

CB : The drawings are traces of precious moments of observation. Without them I wouldn't know where to begin, especially because it's always the same landscape. As surprising as it may seem, I don't invent this landscape, nor the clouds in the sky and the sunbeams. The landscape itself is more imaginative than I am. When the elements appear, I draw them.

*CH/CLR : Why do you use drawings rather than photos?*

CB : Because photos record too much information and are confined to a realistic naturalism that doesn't interest me. I'm in favour of everything in painting that isn't an image.

In working out my paintings the choices are exactly the same as with the drawings. For example, I don't find it necessary to produce all the variations of a cloud. I have no desire to deal with questions of form, which would be a distraction from my real interest: vibrations, materiality, the texture of things. In that way I can concentrate on what I consider essential.

*CH/CLR : What you draw is a synthesis of what interests you. Does that mean that what interests you is what can't be photographed?*

CB : Drawing allows me to capture things rapidly. My hand has a freedom and autonomy in terms of the interpretation of

forms. The drawing has to be executed quickly because the landscape changes very quickly. This lets me paint a cloud that doesn't look like anything I would have sketched.

*CH/CLR : When photography first appeared it was considered a "mirror of memory," whereas drawing also is also a memnotic device that allows for a differed phase in the execution of paintings. It gives you time. Do you remember every drawing?*

CB : I start painting four or five canvases at the same time. I choose five drawings that I use in parallel. They deal with slightly different things, but there are also similarities.

I don't remember every sketch. You have to forget if you want to keep your eye fresh. For me, doing drawings in the moment means an eternal recommencement, like a sunrise. It's like falling in love at first sight. It's violent and vital, full of hopes and promises. That feeling more or less guides my paintings.

Nevertheless, I need to keep the sketch until the painting is done. It's like my score. I can't finish the painting without it.

*CH/CLR : Many artists work from memory, but you talk about the need to forget.*

CB : I'm an unconditional fan of Marcel Proust. There's a passage in *Le temps retrouvé* that's relevant here. He writes about the surprise, that sudden shock of recognition, that only comes when you're not looking for it. It's not something we see; something happens somewhere within us. I'm looking for that sensation.

*CH/CLR : Can you always decipher your notes - your score?*

CB : Yes! They let me figure out what's

happening in the painting, because nothing is pre-programmed. They're basic indications that allow me to put the colours and values into place. Little by little, I begin to feel that sensation until it hits me full on. It can happen very quickly, or slowly, or even disappear. I call this killing the painting, and then it has to be brought back to life so that the sensation reappears. But how?

Emotion simultaneously constitutes the compass, the beacon and the subject. It's like in Courbet's *La Source de la Loue*<sup>1</sup>, where the water flows right out of the mountain. It's an existential experience, like an inexhaustible landscape. What gets me is this perpetual gift. My landscapes don't repeat themselves. They're all different because of the moon and stars, the sky, the clouds, the mountains, the lake, the light, the rain, the mist and so on.

*CH/CLR : Do you consider yourself part of the German-Swiss Romantic and ecological tradition? Is your work also a reflection on our contemporary malaise regarding the fragility of nature in the Anthropocene?*

CB : No, I situate myself more in the mountain people tradition. My great-grandparents lived in Monte Verità and liked to roll naked in the grass. As a child, I experienced nature deeply.

If I paint mountains, it's because I was so fascinated by the idea of what's behind this gigantic wall. For me, they're a metaphor for desire. I constantly celebrate Lake Geneva because it's my birthright. It's incredible to be born there. I've seen it since the moment I was born.

As for ecology, it's fashionable. Once again we're seeing a return to nature. I went through that in the 1970s but I have no desire to illustrate socio-political issues.

<sup>1</sup> *The Source de la Loue* is a recurring theme explored by Gustave Courbet between 1863 and 1864. Drawing on his native terroir, these oils on canvas form an ensemble that explores the same theme from different angles.

*CH/CLR : Are some of your landscapes reminiscent of science fiction?*

CB : Possibly, insofar as I'm a poetic visionary. I don't situate myself in the field of science fiction, even though I feel very related to it. I was a passionate reader of comic books, stuff about space shuttles and everything that goes on in distant galaxies, because, again, what interested me is what's going on behind the mountains. That's what draws my work toward another world, another space.

Mystery is what's attractive. The other planet is this one. Periods of boredom, dreaming and waiting are fruitful for me. I want to place painting in that universe, beyond the act of painting. That's where I find access to poetry and spirituality. My whole life is a search for the existence of the soul. The way it can exist and breath in the face of intense materialism. I'm concerned with a very independent spirituality, more real than theoretical, a practice connecting the body and the mind.

*CH/CLR : Your landscape paintings call to mind traditional Chinese landscapes because of the relationship with the passage of time.*

CB : True. They present an accumulation of observations over the course of years. At the moment when the paintings are executed, memory guides my decisions. My memory is based on observation, not reality, since, as you know, I paint in my studio and not while looking at the landscape.

*CH/CLR : Harmony, balance, synthesis and economy all play a crucial role in your work. Your paintings are suffused with a feeling of suspension, bringing out the vibrations and textures of things. Your painting is almost seismographic, as if you were recording what goes on deep*

*within matter.*

CB : I love that idea of suspension and the word itself. Floating is an accurate description. It's corporal. But really, it's neither an idea nor a concept; rather it's a physical sensation where the body is so powerful it can do whatever it wants! The lake is a mirror, an inexhaustible source of reserves, of sensations, emotions and visions that I recognize and that already exist somewhere. I concentrate on the fleeting moment when things are suspended. For example, at night the moon lets you see the mountain. For a fraction of a second all the elements appear in an almost perfect relationship with each other. Then, when the wind comes up and the reflection disappears, it all vanishes. I have the feeling that my role is to be at the service of the lake, to be its scribe and record its humours.

# BIOGRAPHY

After studying at the École des arts décoratifs in Geneva, Caroline Bachmann lived and worked in Barcelona and Rome before returning to Switzerland in 2003, where she is currently based. From 2007 to 2022, she was professor and head of the painting and drawing department at the HEAD art school in Geneva.

She collaborated with Swiss artist Stefan Banz between 2004 and 2014, during which time they founded KMD - Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp | The Forestay Museum of Art, an exhibition and research space they ran together for over ten years.

Caroline Bachmann lives and works between Cully and Berlin. Her studio practice, mainly pictorial, is guided by a particular focus on avant-garde outsiders. She revisits the subjects of modernism to propose a figurative painting that relies mainly on subjective metaphors, the densification of forms, and a certain insistence on the process of making.

# THANK YOU

Caroline Bachmann would like to thank Claire Hoffmann and Claire Le Restif, Julia Widmann and Gea Casolaro, the galleries Meyer Riegger (Basel, Berlin, Karlsruhe) and Gregor Staiger (Milan, Zurich); the teams at the Centre culturel suisse in Paris, Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Embassy and Crédac, as well as the technical team responsible for editing, Christian Giordano and Josselin Vidalenc. The artist would also like to thank all the public and private lenders who generously contributed to this exhibition.

## LE MATIN EVENTS

■ Wednesday 18th October ■ 5:00pm TALK AT PARIS  
INTERNATIONALE

Caroline Bachmann, Claire Le Restif and Mohamed Mbougar Sarr\* (Prix Goncourt 2021) discuss art and literature. The talk takes place at 17 rue du Faubourg Poissonnière 75009 Paris \*subject to change

■ Saturday 25th November ■ 4:00pm TALK

Caroline Bachmann and Paul Bernard (Director of Kunsthau Pasquart in Bienne) discuss the artist's practice. Free admission.

■ Sunday 3rd December ■ 4:00pm CONCERT

Students from Irène Lecoq's class at the Ivry-sur-Seine conservatory put on a musical performance inspired by the works in the exhibition. The public is invited to stroll from one room to another to the rhythm of the musical interventions. Free admission.

## LE BUREAU DES PUBLICS S'EXPOSE ! EVENTS

■ 16th and 17th Sept.  
SCREENING OF THE THREE FILMS ON A LOOP

■ From 20th Sept. until 15th Oct. BOUILLON BLANC  
(2021-2022)

HOW DO YOU INTEGRATE AN ARTISTIC PROJECT INTO THE HEALTHCARE ENVIRONMENT?

■ Saturday 7th Oct. ■ 3:00 - 6:00pm

Presentation of *Bouillon blanc* by the film team, followed by a discussion with Hélène Carbonnel, co-author of *Bouillon blanc*; Lauren Coullard, visual artist; Pauline Allain, coordinator at Ehpap de l'Orangerie in Ivry; Seval Ozmen, in charge of cultural activities at Maison nationale des artistes / Ehpap de la Fondation des Artistes; Alain Villez, President of the Semaine Bleue national committee.

Moderator: Bénédicte Tourrette: founder and president of the association Le Fil art et grand âge. Free admission

■ From 18th Oct. until 12th Nov. LA DANSE DES BRIQUES  
(2022)

DANCED STROLL

■ Saturday 28th Oct. ■ 3:00 - 6:00pm

To celebrate the launch of the film screening of *La danse des briques* at Crédac, a dance walk is organized with users of the Maison municipale de quartier Plateau-Monmousseau. Departure from La Briqueterie at 3:00pm, arrival at Crédac at 4:00pm, film screening at 4:30pm followed by a festive drink. Free admission

■ From 15th Nov. au 17th Dec. HORS-JEU (2023)  
SCREENING

■ Wednesday 15th Nov. ■ 6:00 - 8:00pm

Meet the artist and participants and presentation of the *Hors-jeu* project at Crédac by Julia Borderie, teachers and students. Free admission

## BUREAU DES PUBLICS

■ Sunday 17 Sept. ■ 2:30 et 4:30pm JOURNÉES DU  
PATRIMOINE

Archival presentation of the history of the Manufacture des Œillets, followed by a visit to the exhibition *Le matin*.

■ Thursday 21st Sept.\* ■ 5:00 - 7:00pm TEACHER'S VISIT

Teachers can discover the exhibition with the Bureau des publics team, then book a visit and workshop for their class.

■ Sundays 1st and 15th Oct.  
and 17th Dec. ■ 4:00pm SUNDAY VISIT  
Guided tour of the exhibition.

■ Saturday 14th Oct\* ■ 4:00 - 6:00pm CONTEMPLATIVE VISIT

A guided tour of the exhibition combines breathing exercises and meditative practices, echoing Caroline Bachmann's paintings, in collaboration with the association Mouvement et Créativité. Participants are asked to bring their own yoga mats.

■ From 23rd until 28th Nov. C'EST MON PATRIMOINE !  
Information to come on our website and in our newsletters.

■ Thursday 23rd Nov.\* ■ 12:00 - 2:00pm CRÉDACANTINE

Guided tour of the exhibition by the artist and the Crédac team, followed by lunch. Lunch €8 / members €5

■ Thursday 30th Nov.\* ■ 4:00 - 5:30 ART-THÉ

Guided tour of the exhibition, followed by a discussion on the resources of the Ivry media library. Tea and pastries are available.

■ Sunday 10th Dec.\* ■ 3:00 - 5:00\* ATELIER-GOÛTER

Young and old discover the exhibitions together. Families then take part in a hands-on workshop that extends the visit in a sensitive and fun way, over a snack. Designed for children aged 6 to 12.

\*Free events unless otherwise indicated. Reservations essential:  
01 49 60 25 06 / contact@credac.fr

## PARTNERSHIP

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