

## Clémentine Bruno, Parker Ito & Christophe de Rohan Chabot

White Sands ATS-3

01.12.2023 - 27.01.2024

*White Sands ATS-3* is a group exhibition bringing together new works by three international artists, Clémentine Bruno, Parker Ito, and Christophe de Rohan Chabot, and including a collaboration with artist Will Sheridan. Curated by Caroline Drevait and Estelle Marois, the project emerges from researches into figures of incompleteness, and explorations of the interplay between notions of desire, distance, and consumption.

Comprising paintings, sculptures, prints, and photography, the artworks in *White Sands ATS-3* reference both canonical art history and digital cultures, questioning their own relationship—whether it be reverential, affective, ambiguous, slippery, or fragmentary—to such references. The selected artworks lay bare the embedding and workings of desire within contemporary imagery; and, interrogating the distinction between original and copy, and the notion of ownership, they activate the power of images to transcend representation.

Navigating across peripherality and centrality, French artist Clémentine Bruno's works echo the ethos of readymades. Made of a manufactured lamp and positioned in a top corner of the gallery, *Private Space* is reminiscent of a surveillance camera, strategically placed to capture the room's activity from a comprehensive angle. Yet, it avoids adherence to the edges (walls and ceiling), as if to slightly alter its functionality. Two paintings, *TOTAL I* (2022) and *TOTAL XXX* (2023), solemnly occupy an entire wall. Conceived as anaemic or dessicated interpretations of El Greco's painting *The Adoration of the Name of Jesus* (late 1570s), these works investigate the influence of Masters as crushing, totalising references. Employing gesso, a type of paint that has been in use since the 14th century, and panels produced by Italian artisans who supply wood for religious icons, Bruno somehow reenacts historical techniques 'as were', to critically reflect on the construction of artistic canons and academism. This gesture resonates with the digital poster *TOTAL* (2023), an altered reproduction of a found image of Anthony of Padua, the saint of lost things. The Dutch angle and unconventional installation behind the gallery desk disrupt traditional practices of centrality and frontality, disorientating the spatial perception of power plays. Finally, Bruno's presentation involves a series of photographs commissioned to London-based, American artist Will Sheridan, adhered to gallery windows and street-facing. They mimic the appearance of stickers typically glued on city walls or urban furniture in multiples, providing a window into what they advertise. Serving as threshold, representation, and promise, they engage in a contractual relationship with the viewer. In Bruno's words, they are analogous to what they promote—only differing in form.

Bruno's work traces the displacements of permanence, whether through transient historical forms, or structural functions distributed across objects within the exhibition (that of artwork or poster). Something persists and, in this economy, a copy is not a derivative but an encapsulation of the original. Displacements, collaborations, ready-mades, and pared-down revisions of dead influences converge into a questioning of the notion of artistic authority. What does the artist author, when their authority stems from previously established conventions? Must one exhaust the familiar to deplete hegemonic traditions and institutionalised egos? And unearth the space where unconfessed subjectivity lingers? Bruno's works underscores a conscientious engagement with processes of composition, labour and craft, drafting a potential response within.

French artist Christophe de Rohan Chabot's artworks establish an interplay between their compact, stocky silhouettes and the volume they punctuate with sharp precision. Hung at average height, two pairs of ordinary figures (a set of hearts and a set of Pikachu faces) emerge as four focal points from which the white walls unfold. The production process starts with the artist zooming in on screenshots he captured of images of the Instagram heart-shaped 'like' feature and the Pikachu character. The artwork's dimensions fit standard travel suitcase sizes, and their box-like form accentuate a common nature of manufactured objects. The artist appropriates the face of Pikachu by substituting its

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iconic yellow hue with red and black saturated tints, while also altering the original shapes through cropping. This, as if to search for the tipping point where the sense of familiarity transforms into an uncanny feeling; where cuteness turns into the grotesque and even into the monstrous. All the more so as the works' flatness, felt at first sight, becomes three-dimensional as we walk in the exhibition space and acknowledge that the surfaces are mounted on a kind of wall pedestal. Below the matte, impervious screen lies a depth that can be penetrated—and from *Untitled (redy)* to *Untitled (red guy)*, the intensification in colour contrasts works to reshape the eye and mouth zones into unexplored tunnels of darkness. De Rohan Chabot exposes the hidden connection between aversion, attraction, and the generic. He does so by activating mechanisms through which widespread, commonplace figures emerge as the most attention-grabbing. If we find ourselves compelled to tap heart shapes on our phone screens everyday, it might be because the scintillation of *Untitled (red heart.black circle.strass)* and *Untitled (black heart.strass)*'s rhinestones exists within the actual Instagram 'like' feature. The sculptures' sheen, roundness, grainy texture and protrusion from the walls variously express the enticing tactility of buttons and the revered status of icons—two terms actually used to describe such digital elements. The works also evoke the bold design of signage display or, in tandem with the red and black colour palette, casino chips that anxious hands slide against each other. Anxiety, tenderness, love—all emotions we believe to be uniquely ours—reveal themselves to be already categorised and pre-inscribed within these product-artworks, whose auras precede and define the relationship we share with them.

Embracing their status as images and products, yet manifesting an unexpected and forceful agency, de Rohan Chabot's figures exist both in and out of the realm of commonality, in and out of the Nintendo and Meta Platforms empires, in and out of the confines of our personal affective worlds.

American artist Parker Ito's work deals with the way images are perceived in the post-internet era, and inscribed in a wider visual network. Identifying primarily as an image-maker, Ito uses different tools, such as artificial intelligence or painting, to think of what images engage with. Belonging to a constellation of pictures that exists within the scope of the individual artist while also extending beyond, images form associations on the basis of stylistic kinship. In the process, images distance themselves from the source or content they would initially refer to—with genre increasingly becoming the predominant field of reference.

Two of the canvasses presented in the exhibition—*Visions of the Pilgrim's Printer Progress from this world, to that which is to come (knight 3)* and *Visions of the Pilgrim's Printer Progress from this world, to that which is to come (A printhead is the thing the ink squirts out of and is the most important part of a printer. Epson is like the Mercedes-Benz of printers.)*—use a AI-generated portrait of a knight, a recurring figure in his work. The process began with inputting a reference image of Georges Rochegrosse's *Le Chevalier aux fleurs* (1894), housed in the Musée d'Orsay, into the AI programme. In the Western imaginary, the figure of the knight is, since the Middle Ages, an archetype, thus subject to reproduction. In other words, it is a reverberation of its temporal context—something that the reflection on the knight's shiny armour might suggest here. As a vessel holding the memory of ancient tales and legends, as a conglomeration of stories, the knight is born at the confluence of historical canons, of anonymous and ungraspable visions aggregated by AI, and—as the artist presents the paintings as self-portraits—of Ito himself. The knight is a precursor to contemporary stars (the plethora of images of knights crafted by humans attests to this)—idols that, as Edgar Morin wrote, are 'consumed' by the fan who wants 'to know everything: possess, manipulate, and mentally digest the total image of the idol'<sup>1</sup>, assimilating 'into his own personality a little of the star's body and soul.'<sup>2</sup> There is a bit of ourselves in knights and stars, and a bit of them in ourselves.

In *Visions of the Pilgrim's Printer Progress from this world, to that which is to come (virginia creeper)* and *Visions of the Pilgrim's Printer Progress from this world, to that which is to come (mary/flipper/easel/palette)*, the seemingly abstract backgrounds originate from a photograph of a hummingbird whose rapid flutter created a self-obscuring image. Contemporary reproduction techniques further multiply copies, making it increasingly challenging to identify their origins. Here, the output image of two scanners scanning each other, the selfie reflecting the character's position onto ours, the etched inscriptions reminiscent of tattoos whose original meanings, whether foreign or ancient, have been lost to aesthetics, but also the artist's manipulation of ink as it came out of the printer—all these elements subvert the traditional dynamic between original and copy, engaging in a game of infinite reflection. Supplemented with figures of

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<sup>1</sup> E. Morin, *The Stars. An Account of the Star-System in Motion Pictures*, trans. R. Howard, New York, London, Evergreen Profile Books, 1961, p. 92

<sup>2</sup> Morin, *The Stars*, p. 169

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artists, a Poulbot and a robot, the whole juxtaposition further suggests that reverberation is the authorial principle in image-making and receiving. Another AI-generated print fuses classical portraiture and 'hot babe' vibes, revealing the coding of desire and lust in any image. Whatever transpires between us—as artist or viewer—and an artwork might be aptly termed self-absorption.

*White Sands ATS-3* is part of an exhibition-based research project looking into scopic regimes, concepts of erasures and resurfacing, and the determination of desire. As an initial investigation, the group exhibition *not before it has forgotten you* took place at The Pole Gallery, Paris and Nicoletti, London (2022). Inspired by Georges Perec's pursuit to give form to absence in *La Disparition* [A Void, 1969], the show presented works by Clémentine Bruno, Mara Fortunatovic, Eva Gold, and Bella Riza. *White Sands ATS-3* expanded to examine figures of incompleteness and impermanence, as visual and/or physical markers of the tension between possession and frustration that characterises desire. The inspiration for *White Sands ATS-3* draws from diverse sources: the structuring figure of the gnomon, in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), as a diagramme of incompleteness, whose missing part alludes to the whole; *Architecture without Walls* (2016), edited by Alex Arteaga and Boris Hassenstein, examining non-visual, sensual and emotional approaches to the environment; architectures of power and domination materialised by domes and spheres; as well as the first photographs of the whole earth that gave its name and covers to Stewart Brand's landmark *Catalog* (1968-1972).

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