

Triple A: Ad, Art, and Alternative Narrations

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Ad Minoliti, *warm hole & hot tea*, exhibition view, Crèvecœur, Paris, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Crèvecœur, Paris. Photo: Martin Argyroglo.

Ad Minoliti's art explores alternative perspectives on the world. Their practice fuses political activism and modernist critique, painting and puppets, gender-theory and wellbeing awareness. Multi-sensual and multi-color, their works and installations create unfamiliar experiences and offer new narrations. Their exhibition *warm hole & hot tea* at Galerie Crèvecœur addresses adulthood and proposes a child-like approach. Playing allowed!

Your exhibition at Crèvecœur titles "Warm hole & hot tea" – is this a winter exhibition?

[Smiles] Not really, it was not chosen on purpose for the season, but it's a happy coincident. The title describes the exhibition's central idea, what if paintings could live inside the wall? Both venues explore this idea of a home for paintings as another alternative universe.

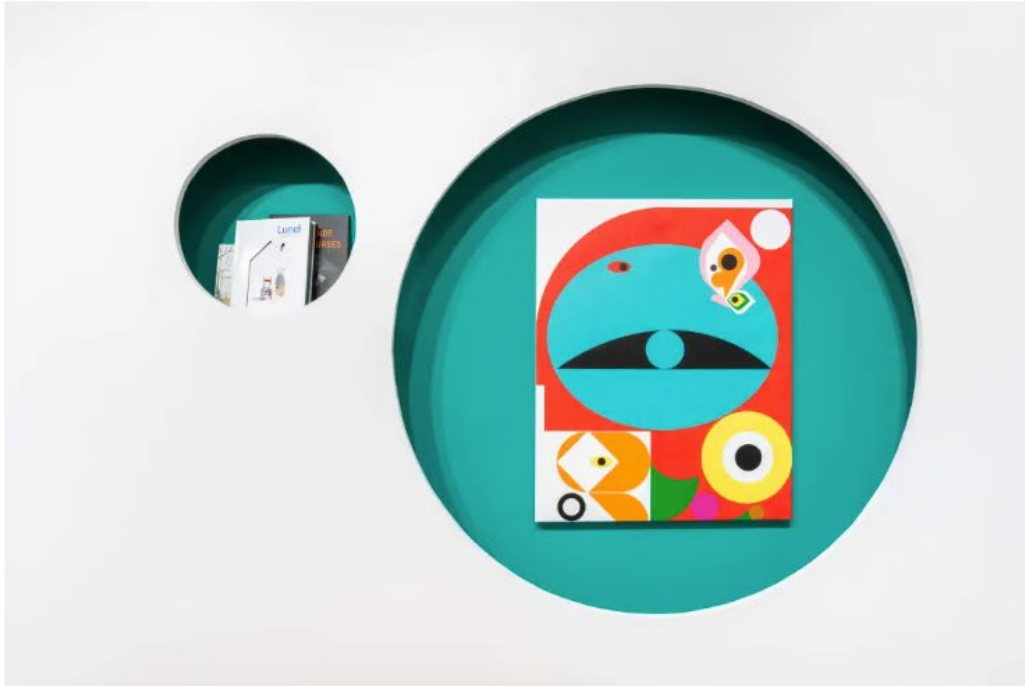
How did this idea of living paintings first come up?

The idea kept evolving around the round windows in [Tate] St. Ives. The installation at rue de Beaune takes up these round portals using a fake wall with a hole and a painting hanging inside. The eyes on the adjacent wall transform the white surface into a character, to make the space playful. The murals at rue des Cascades form dollhouse-like burrows for the paintings to live in. These homes are a continuation of using murals as a colourful reaction against the white cube, and are inspired by vintage illustrations of cosy fantastical places.

Next to the murals and paintings, there are numerous children's books lying in both exhibition spaces. What is their purpose?

The books create context and give sense to the whole. They are an invitation to browse and dwell and create alternative narrations. Some of the books have holes, recalling the exhibition's gesture and revealing something hidden... Adulthood is a main concern in my work, the way how and why we ascribe certain behaviours as being 'adult' and on the other hand regard childhood as so little. Through my work, I hope to create and subvert these perspectives on things.

Crèveœur



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Is the exhibition meant as caring gesture?

Yes, one intention certainly was to create a warm and colourful spot to relax, and read! My work is a lot about raising awareness for tenderness and care.

The bright colours and soft materials in your installations likewise allude to childhood. Are the installations an invitation to the viewer to become a child again; or are they more generally a visual-emotional critique to our rationally shaped world?

Both, we are the same person as kids but with more information today. The installations are definitely an invitation to rethink, but we don't really live in a rational world. I would say a capitalist system that divides by age for example! I want to consider childhood and anti-adulthood as a political statement that sadly is not very often the core of institutional programs.

Good point! Since 2019, life-size animal puppets have been inhabiting your installations. What is the role of these protagonists?

I started doing mannequins after a collaboration with two Argentinian textile designers. They created clothes with my paintings on patterns which I wanted to incorporate into my installations. The clothes were for me expanded paintings as a reference to the human body. The mannequins in the installations constitute a third presence between the space and the viewer. With the addition of the masks they transform the space with an animal fantasy.

The puppets are called "furrries" – are they furry?

[Laughs] No, they are not. The name refers to the animal-like material 'fur', and the furry fandom [a subculture interested in anthropomorphic animal characters]. To me, these are anthropomorphic characters, I like their cartoonish-style and animal dimensions. In their shape and material, they well fit into the idea of an alternative, non-human universe; the fur embodies tenderness while the sexual connotations and fetish carried in the fandom alludes to political activism, so here they form part of an activism for softness.

Crèvecœur



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Do you like dressing up?

Oh yes! I did walk as a drag king a couple of times and I regularly follow up drag performance. But I am very shy so it takes an effort for me and can only happen in a safe environment.

Your work constantly shifts between abstraction and figuration, how would you yourself describe their relation in your work?

The binary is a myth: for example many artist books suggest a kind of line chronology, starting with portraiture and landscape etc. to eventually arrive at the abstract masterpiece. I see our practice more as a spiral – not a linear evolution – revisiting and reconsidering certain aspects. There is a great book by Allison Kafer called *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, which describes a different idea of time and challenges ideas of gender, cyborgs and ableism. Age is not something but is being constructed for particular means.

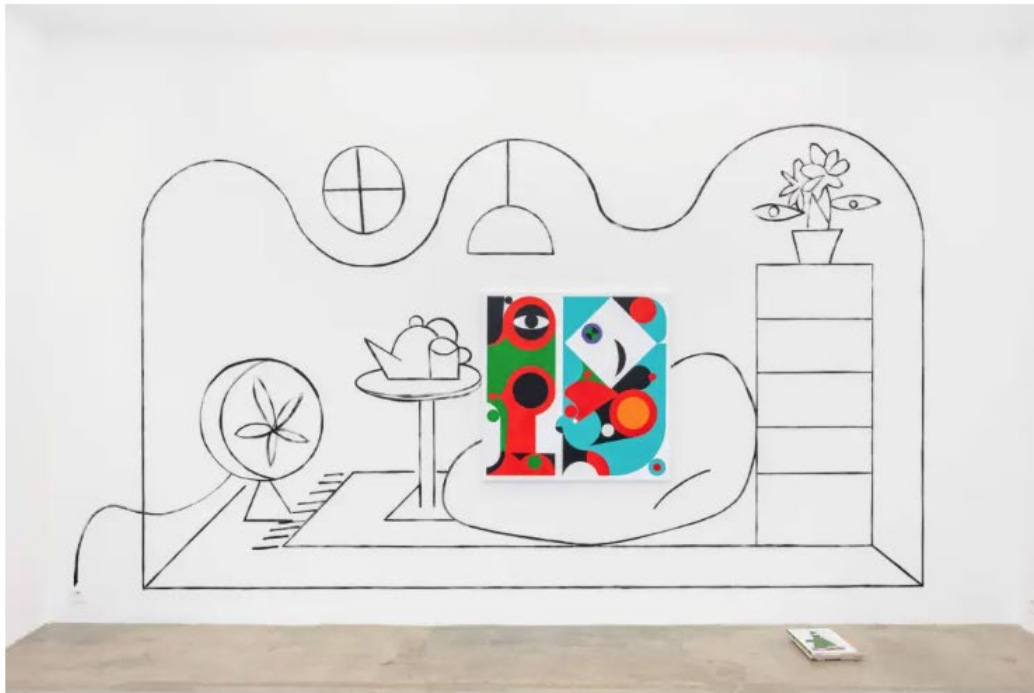
Which role does narration play in your installations?

The paratext of each project is very important, and starts with fanzines, collages of texts, essays, quotes or memes. However, it is not a narration along the classical lines of introduction, core and denouement. Sometimes the paratext is given by a bookshelf or a selection of books, like now at Crèvecœur. I believe the paratext of the painting gives them the political sense that I work with. One time a person wrote me that he likes the paintings but not the “feminist propaganda”, like if these two can be separated... I laughed, but then I felt sad for him.

Similarly, your paintings often combine hard edges and round forms – is this a meeting point between masculine/feminine culture?

My work – like me – is non-binary. The categories that shape our lives are built by laws and concerned by control; but biology is non-binary, too. I started working with gender theory in my twenties and for me painting in particular is a tool to deconstruct. My teacher, Diana Aisenberg, introduced me to her method of questioning where painting becomes the best stomach digester: *Why do you like what you like? How do we build desire?* It is not even about the answers which keep mutating. My work is about initiating a process, and painting serves to have these discussions, from a visual art perspective.

Crèvecœur



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Your work features design, computer aesthetics, space images, toy figures – What did you like to look at when you were a child?

There were many things! I loved the theatre, cartoons, animated movies, and illustrations from books and images. I guess, they all inhabit my images today in one way or the other. The particular design of each installation however always depends on the space and context it is created for.

Your work *Playboard*, shown at Art Basel 2019, to me strongly recalls a 'temple'. Is this a notion you would like to address in your work?

The work was conceived of as a 'monument to cyber-feminism', so this work was supposed as a kind of homage. Generally, my iconography is more varied though. The vast triangular shape in *Playboard*, for example, is a reference to the Argentinian feminist movement. In 2003, the National Campaign for Legal Abortion created the green bandanas in triangular shape as symbol for the fight for reproductive rights. The green bandana is a tribute to the 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo' [an Argentinian human rights organisation advocating for the people, mostly men, who disappeared during the military dictatorship under Jorge Rafael Videla between 1976-1983] who had used white bandanas as a symbol in their struggle for justice. In *Playboard*, I place the green bandana to the screen wishing to spread the same imagery and its layered implications.

Given this sense of 'screen aesthetics' – which is your disposition to video games and new technology?

I started thinking about technology after reading Donna Haraway. The idea of science-fiction and cyborgs is in all my paintings. The recent series combines painted and printed parts, machine and human-made images which recalls the melting between organic and machine. Likewise, Donna Haraway conceives of the cyborg as having no beginning or end, they are immortal. I like this idea with regards to my paintings.

Crèvecoeur



Ad Minoliti, *Mesa 2*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Crèvecoeur, Paris. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

Do you work mostly digitally or analogue?

I work a lot with the computer, simply because it is easier to create variables there. Of course, I draw and paint a lot and with other people and artists like María Ibañez Lago and Milagros Rojas; for the series *Fantasías*, for example, I used stencils designed by my mom Cecilia. But Photoshop is a key part during the process.

Are you working on a film or would like to?

At the moment I am not, though I would like to. I am planning to do a series of Canvasses inspired by children's books, paintings added with text – Canvas stories. I have many different projects which rest in a kind of idea storage spot waiting for the opportunity.

Coming back to the forms and shapes, I see Kandinsky, Matisse, Bauhaus in your paintings, the playful approach references Dada. Your work, however, criticizes the male dominance within these avant-gardes. Is your work an attempt to implement their forms into other environments, i.e. other ways of thinking?

Yes. It is a love-hate relation, I try to get the best out of it by creating a hybrid, cancelling all the racism, hetero-norms and classism: an anti-modernism which comprises queer geometrical abstraction, feminism, humour, and tenderness for example. The current show [at Crèvecoeur] criticises the notion of adulthood as being something illustrious or superior. There is a historical dissemination of certain roles or subjects such as the child which I try to challenge in my work.

Crèveœur



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Your work emanates an incredible sense of positivity. Where do you see art's main stakes in the current days?

Sadly, mainstream political art is sensationalism. In Spanish, we call it "porno-miseria". There are works which touch upon important socio-political topics and get a lot of media attention. But which is the effect? To me, many are a fetishism of misery by white cis and rich creators. There is a lot of art nowadays which is not televised in famous magazines, groups working between art and activism whose work does have an actual impact on their communities, even micropolitics. In 2023, I will participate in a festival with the artist collective Aravani Art Project in India, which will host many others guests with queer practices as drag, poetry, and therapy. Aravani Art Project is a group of trans women that paint murals in public spaces. It is such practices of change which I regard as artistically relevant.

Speaking with Adorno, though, how can an individual cause change in a wrong system, or change the wrong structures respectively?

Today there is always the question, should an action have a function or be efficient? My practice is functional in many ways, but where is the permit of failure or experiment too? I think art can provide this experimental space and through it arrive at alternative solutions. It is about micro-politics, widening up to a grand scale.

Can you elaborate on this?

The painting as a place of resistance is not only my idea, but stands in relation with many groups such as Cromoactivismo [an artist collective from Buenos Aires which challenges the standardized use of colour], Identidad Marron [an interdisciplinary group that fights racism towards brown people in Argentina]. It forms part of an expanded practice in Latin America in which artists come together to take up a social function due to a lack of institutional care. The artistic participation in protest has been a tradition in Latin America for a long time too.

Crèvecœur



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To me, your work reaches out both to prehistory (vast, vegetable landscapes) and the far future (space fragments) – do you feel we live in a transition period?

At the beginning, my practice was much concerned about the future. Now, I rather think of a multiverse which does not form part of a chronological timeline. ‘Future’ has become such a heavy concept, there is an institutional trend to expound on posthumanism and the ‘future apocalypse’, that I start running away from it. By now, so many layers have been added to the discussion that I don’t agree anymore with those terms. For me, geometry is a tool to imagine and think through without many of the prejudices, and this also applies to moving out of time.

As mentioned before, your work is characterised by a supposed game aesthetic. Every game has rules, which are the rules in your art?

No animal cruelty. No binaries. No suffering. When I was 34, I started having disabling migraines every month, so part of my practice is to make things easier. Many people think artist life is about suffering like in the movies, I don’t. Society also made a bad publicity of leisure and rest which activists such as *Siestas Negras* or *The Nap Ministry* try to challenge.

You are having exhibitions all over the world: how far does it differ to exhibit in China, Germany, Buenos Aires?

It differs a lot. When showing *The Feminist School of Painting* for example, every context has its different needs and interpretations of feminist debates. In Korea, I was told that queer theory and open feminist critique is still highly contested on mainstream media, but they have a rich matriarchal historical and spiritual legacy that we don’t have in the general catholic Buenos Aires for example. I try to estimate the context of an exhibition by collaborating with local artists, academics and activists at each project.

In one of your artist descriptions it says: “Geometry is for Minoliti the best tool to represent and investigate into the possibility of a non-human heterotopia, an alternative universe, where gender theories can be applied onto the pictorial language, in order to help us understand and experiment the visual world around us.” –In that sense, do your works constitute a neutral ground on which exemplify these ideas while not having to immediately apply them to one’s personal life?

Not really, nothing is neutral because it is coded by subjectivity and social archetypes, but my goal is to look for other ways to question this programming we all have and hopefully we can move towards other forms of togetherness ASAP.

Ad Minoliti’s exhibition *warm hole & hot tea* is on view at [Galerie Crèvecœur](#), [5, rue de Beaune](#) and [9, rue des Cascades](#), Paris, until January 28, 2023.

You can find more information on [the artist’s website](#), via [Galerie Crèvecœur](#), and Ad Minoliti’s [instagram @minoliti](#).