

Tomasz Kowalski Digs Into the Psychic Archeology of Light in Paris,
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The artist's three-part solo exhibition, "At the Excavation Site," at Crèveœur traces how memory, light and mythic perception converge to shape our experience of reality.

By [Elisa Carollo](#) • 11/24/25 9:58am



Galerie Crèveœur debuted Tomasz Kowalski's "At the Excavation Site" during Art Basel Paris. Photo: Martin Argyroglo

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Tomasz Kowalski's paintings possess a universality and timelessness that stem from his effort to translate the restless flow of imagination, memory and intuition that binds human experience across time and space. At the center of his practice is an inquiry into the power of light to illuminate and shape our perception of the external world. What he explores with these paintings is a kind of psychic archaeology of light, an excavation of the deeper relationship between perception, imagination and meaning. These reflections on the phenomenology of reality reach a new theatrical pitch in his groundbreaking debut with Crèveœur, which opened during Art Basel Paris and unfolded across three spaces along Rue de Beaune in the Rive Gauche antiquary district.

Titled "At the Excavation Site," the exhibition's mysterious yet unforgettable paintings reveal symbolic meaning as something formed through layers of fleeting sensations, emotional reactions and reimaginings that drift like souls through the shifting situations to which our temporally limited existence exposes us. "The title can be understood on several levels," Kowalski explains over wine during Paris Art Week. "The excavation suggests a significant passage of time, visible at the intersection of the ground in the layers of earth that have accumulated over the years." In person, the artist embodies the tension visible in his paintings: a profoundly Sartrean awareness of the existential weight of being in the world paired with a Baudelairean impulse toward a fleeting escapism into

The entire show feels animated by a nostalgia for another moment, a time that may not have been brighter in tone but felt more alive and compelling than today's flat scroll-and-roll of images on a screen. Spread across three galleries like chapters with their own frames and boundaries, the exhibition extends the theatrical quality already present in his work into the space itself, creating an environment that mirrors the sensation of temporal dislocation. "I wanted to evoke this sense of being outside of time, in some kind of transhistorical detachment, which can evoke a oneiric/nostalgic feeling," he says. "I hope to be taken away to some other place for a moment."



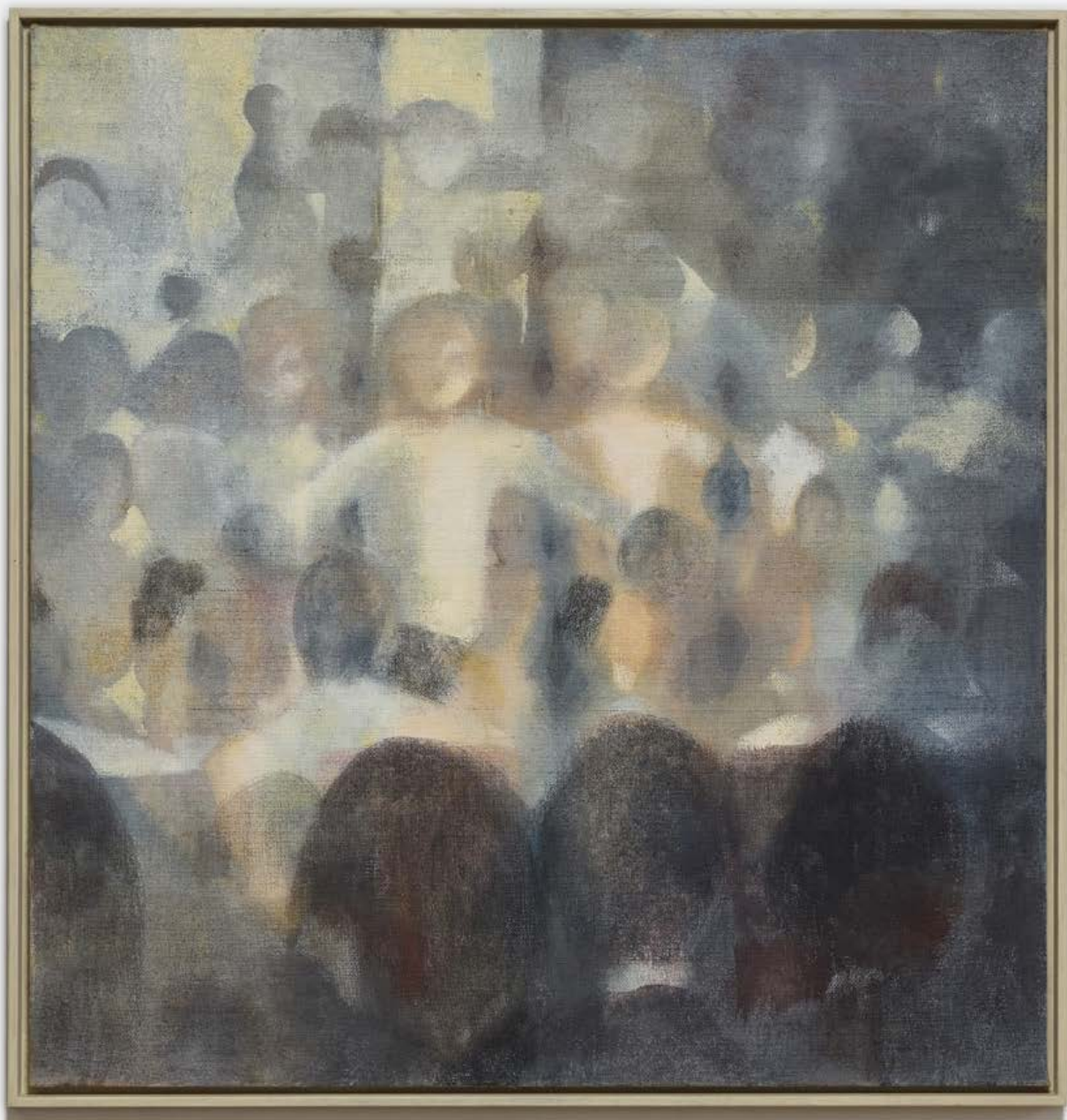
Kowalski's work explores the immediacy and drama of humanity. Photo: Martin Argyroglo

Playing with portals and apertures that open into different dimensions, these dreamlike canvases confront the viewer with something inherently unstable and fleeting, just as perception itself remains unstable, no matter how often we try to frame or crystallize it. “Humans tend to impose grids and divisions, such as time,” Kowalski reflects. “It’s a kind of scenography where what happens between one second and the next becomes mysterious and evocative.”

Unearthing the subtle sensations that accompany memories as they drift to the back of the mind and fade, Kowalski’s paintings become exercises in recollecting and reconnecting with synesthetic and syncretic moments as they condense into images capable of translating this complex interplay. What he seeks to convey is an awareness of reality and human history not only as a constant flux but also as a continuous repetition, as if distilling a Bergsonian notion of duration while capturing multiple moments of transformation, combined with a Jungian sense of recurring psychological and archetypal patterns.

The dynamism and simultaneity that define these works exceed both the Cubist and Futurist attempts to represent shifting planes of vision and movement over time. Here simultaneity is phenomenological, cognitive and psychological, an effort to hold, even momentarily, the fluid blending between object and subject, sensation and emotion and the psychic elaboration that transforms experience into meaning.

The artist acknowledges that a flow of successive movements can only crystallize within an image that remains inherently unstable, a brief arresting of something already slipping away. The blurring and compositional asymmetry in Kowalski’s work underscore this destabilization of perception and the impossibility of fixing reality within the rigid structures of linear time or the tidy progressions art history prefers. “Sometimes I like to perceive a painting as a very slow film in which almost nothing changes,” he reflects. “These repetitions, reflections and sequences are out of my experience. Maybe they are a broader perspective that notices the patterns within which I function.”



Tomasz Kowalski, *untitled*, 2025. Oil, gouache and pencil on jute, 106 x 102 cm. Courtesy Crèveœur and the artist

In the show in Paris, which closes in just a few days, Kowalski seems to revive the immediacy and drama of humanity manifesting under the artist's gaze with the same unfiltered presence seen in the work of Impressionists and modern masters like Lautrec, Degas or, even more fittingly, Balthus (Balthasar Klossowski de Rola). Yet his figures often appear as fading traces struggling to reemerge within a culture of quick perception that cannot pause for these ghostly presences from another time. Spectral and haunting, they return to remind us they are still here, sharing the same concerns under the relentless acceleration of progress. "There is a lot of past present around the three spaces of the gallery at Rue de Beaune, all of which are located in a district of small antique shops and galleries in a neighborhood where two major museums are located," he says. "The third, new gallery space, which was once an antique shop, appears between the two previous spaces, like an excavation itself. My painting reflects the past as well."

This reflection already reveals a growing awareness that when we meet the world and translate it, we inevitably bring our own histories along with the ones we have absorbed through looking and reading. His work captures the constant interchange between the immediacy of present sensation and the deep reservoir of intimate and collective memory that shapes any interpretation of our encounters with the world. His recent paintings often extend or build upon earlier ideas, though the starting point is always a sense of atmosphere, a feeling or a compositional spark. At the center of Kowalski's inquiry is the very concept of light and its meaning as both a tool and an element in our exploration of the world.



Kowalski captures the natural gleam of energy that a body, especially in its raw and genuine expression, can channel: the essence of its soul and its creative purpose before corruption. Courtesy Crève-cœur and the artist

Kowalski turns painting into a phenomenology in its original etymological sense, from the Greek *phaínō*, meaning “to bring to light,” “to make appear” or “to cause to shine.” It becomes a phenomenology of perception, tracing how the body acts as a living filter that receives and processes reality as a shifting field where sensory impressions merge with emotional and cultural memories that frame each encounter. “My approach to the figure is a reflection of my perception in general—everything seems to be equivalent within rays of light, perhaps except meeting someone’s gaze,” he says.

What Kowalski captures is the natural gleam of energy a body, especially in its raw and genuine expression, can channel, the essence of its soul and its creative purpose before corruption. “I don’t see characters and their surroundings separately, only various hierarchies of stationary or moving beings, differently lit, with different surfaces, emanating energies.”

“Despite its suddenness and expressiveness, it operates within a very long historical line, and this kind of relationship spanning the centuries is fascinating. I also understand the title as a question of what will remain of today,” he reflects, noting how this repetition and shifting appear in his sequential compositions, as if condensing an entire trajectory or journey through the evolution of time and humanity, with the same acceleration that marks recent decades but also with a nostalgia for a moment that passed too quickly. In Kowalski’s hands, emotion, memory and spiritual drifts toward the archetypal, echoing Jung’s deeper strata of the psyche and the mythopoetic intuition thinkers like Michael Meade describe, where images become portals to the collective stories we carry as we navigate a world in perpetual motion.



In Paris, Kowalski stages his paintings in a worn, time-softened space, heightening their suspended, otherworldly narratives. Photo: Martin Argyroglo

When asked how these paintings test the endurance of images and the way motifs and archetypes recur throughout art history, he acknowledges that this is simply part of engaging with the long conversation of painting. “Painting and image-making is a long conversation. Figurative motifs recur, and there are a certain number of them in culture.” He reaches, however, for something even more universal: the key element through which life and reality manifest to us. “Once light is captured, it can reveal any story,” Kowalski reflects, noting his recent interest in shifting perceptions of light, from symbolism (thinking of spiritual and auratic readings like Fernand Khnopff or Witold Wojtkiewicz) to later modernism like Oskar Schlemmer, the Bauhaus or constructivism, which feels close to the transhumanist dilemma we find ourselves in today. As the relationship between light and reality has been reshaped by the continuous presence of screens and technological interfaces, from cinema to the mobile phone, everything has shifted.

This tension between reflection, fragmentation, splitting and multiplying into different emotional and narrative possibilities, enabled by technological devices and screens—at once imaginary, documentary and alienating filters—still depends entirely on human imagination and creativity. More than reels or any streaming series, most of Kowalski’s works feel like vintage films or proto-cinematic dioramas, still living in the liminal space between the human and the screen, a space not yet entirely overtaken by the algorithmic elaboration of an A.I. device but filled by the potentially endless power of mythical imagination unfolding.



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