

“The negative version of the official version of things”

Curated by Julie Beaufile

May 15—June 15, 2021

Beneath the official version of history, other unofficial versions often develop, like film negatives from a series of photos. These can be histories with a capital “H,” as much as popular stories that are transmitted from generation to generation, from lips to ears. In “What Is the Contemporary?” Agamben writes : “The ones who can call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity.”¹ History, as we know it, and as we are included in it, forms around the writings of those who have won wars, conquered kingdoms, imposed laws, and had the chance to tell the stories of those struggles. The voices of others—the oppressed, the dissenting—are heard in other ways. Surviving through writing and visual arts, these voices are shared like underlying testimonies, though they are no less precious and no less authentic. Through the power of their narratives and the strength of their images, these alternative histories sometimes even succeed at overriding the official version.

On a scale beyond that of our world, the universe contains matter that is both visible and invisible to our human eyes. The latter is what astrophysicists call “dark matter,” which, according to recent studies, is much more dense and widespread than visible matter. Its presence is detected because it takes up a great deal of space and thus maintains the compact order of visual elements. As such, luminous matter and dark matter balance one another throughout the universe.

Drawing from this metaphor, the concept here is to show how the practices of 11 contemporary artists exist and coexist in the world today. Each is situated within a constellation of references from personal experience, popular culture, and pieces of western and non-western art history. Looking at their work, we can reflect on what it means to be “contemporary” today, and what it means to have access to so many references simultaneously. The omnipresence of social media leads us to reconsider the origins of

¹ Giorgio Agamben, “What is the Contemporary?” in *“What is an Apparatus?” and Other Essays* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 45.

BALICE HERTLING

GALERIE

information, to toggle between public and private, to follow or not to follow a profile illuminated by its number of followers. Faced with multiple versions of the same fact or story, we must question the authenticity of the source, the sovereignty of which is challenged each time. Although this constant questioning can at times be disconcerting, it can also become valuable by allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives and a diversity of narratives. At a time when certain large companies have as much or even more power than governments, the relationship between official and unofficial is no longer binary but gives way to an assembly of voices. The selection of criteria for determining the value of one narrative over another remains as relevant as ever.

The current exhibition proposes to see how, in this contemporary era, artists make visible what might not be already, what is held in the shadows by a light too blinding.

Lucas Arruda (painting), **Nicolas Faubert** (performance), **Mona Varichon** (photos), **Benjamin K Bertrand** (video, dance, texte), **Rafik Greiss** (photo), **Laura Owens** (drawings), **Louise Lawler** (installation), **Morgan Courtois** (sculpture), **Julie Beaufils** (painting), **Jacob Eisenmann** (installation).