

METAL

MARC PADEU

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE JOURNEY



Marc Padeu enjoys the journey, bringing out the best in each stage of the creative process until reaching the final result. His name is becoming more and more popular on the international art scene and now he is represented by a gallery, which of course has brought with it certain facilities and natural evolution. But his essence remains intact, and his worldview has hardly changed. The Cameroon-born painter is now presenting his second solo exhibition with Peres Projects and his first one in Milan, Dans la plantation, until April 5. We speak with him to go through his artistic career and his main sources of inspiration, and ask him about his plans for the next months.

Pursuing his pictorial exploration of Cameroon's agricultural regions, which began in a banana plantation in Njombé-Penja, Marc Padeu now takes us on a journey to a cacao plantation a few kilometres from Yaoundé with his new exhibition, Dans la plantation. And he does it through paintings that, though having a realistic starting point that he acknowledges is not what interests him the most, surprise visitors and even himself. Being a lover of the freedom that this creative discipline grants him and a declared fan of some Old Masters such as Velázquez and Caravaggio, Padeu says he wants to paint more outdoor scenes this year.

How are you and where do you answer us from?

Thank you! I'm answering from Yaoundé, the capital of Cameroon.

You're now presenting your second solo exhibition with Peres Projects and your first one in Milan, Dans la plantation. Before delving into it, could you tell us how you're feeling right now? What has this creative

PERES PROJECTS

process meant emotionally?

I feel very motivated right now! I have a lot of motivation to create even bigger and deeper projects. I realise that it's very important to persevere in everything. It's all about the journey, the creative process that I repeat every day and that is now completely part of my life.

With this new body of work, you pursue your pictorial exploration of Cameroon's agricultural regions, which began in a banana plantation in Njombé-Penja. What has changed compared to your previous artistic works and what remains intact?

I would say that not much has changed since my first works with the workers of the Haut Penja banana plantations. Now that I am represented by a gallery it is certainly easier to create, I have access to better materials, and I feel more serene in my everyday life. But my state of mind remains the same as when I started.



Through painting along with photography, you recreate scenes you've witnessed. Could we say that your painting is totally realistic, or do you start from everyday life elements to unleash your creativity and explore other possible scenarios?

I spend a lot of time creating my works in my head long before they begin to exist on canvas. Yes, my final paintings have a 'realistic' quality, but that's not what interests me the most when I create. Most of the time, since I use photographs as a starting point, I know exactly what I have to do once in front of my canvas. However, the result is often a surprise, even for me! For instance, I may decide to paint a green cocoa leaf blue. Painting offers so many possibilities and so much freedom. That's something I really like!

We cannot overlook the use of colour in your paintings and the connection between human figures and nature. What other characteristics would you highlight in your artistic work and what makes it different?

Telling stories through my art is what motivates me the most. The idea that each painting can describe a moment of life is very dear to me. From the composition to the facial expressions and gestures of the figures I paint, everything in my work is meant to create a special atmosphere and tell a unique story.

PERES PROJECTS

Let's go back to your childhood, to your birthplace, Melong (Cameroon). What is your fondest memory from this age?

The fondest memory from my childhood in Melong is certainly my daily life at home with my brothers and our father. My parents broke up when I was born, and it wasn't until I was about 10 years old that I was able to see my mother. I have no memories of her before then.



How and when did your first approach to the world of painting take place?

My first direct contact with painting was during my first year at the Institute of Fine Arts, the University of Douala in Nkongsamba. Before that, my approach to painting, and visual arts in general, had been through documentaries I watched in high school.

What artistic movements are your favourites and which painters have strongly influenced your creative vision?

At the Institute of Fine Arts, we studied Renaissance painters and their techniques extensively. Later, I became more interested in the Impressionists – I am captivated by their use of colour and their avant-garde spirit. Among the Old Masters, Diego Velázquez and Caravaggio are those who still inspire me a lot. I am fascinated by Velázquez's remarkable sense of composition and Caravaggio's technical virtuosity.

In your hands, the plantation becomes a metaphor for life in some way: sowing, cultivating, tending, harvesting; and starting over. Are we living too fast? Are we enough connected to the present time, or do we overthink of future too often?

I think that today more than ever time is really what we miss the most on a daily basis. A day is only 24 hours, and an average life is 60 years. Personally, I feel a constant urge to create and do things well. I always try to complete every cycle I start. Exploring, trying, persevering to finish things and having no regrets, that's what drive me. In the end, it is not so much that we live too fast, but that our time is limited, just like plants.

PERES PROJECTS

And what would you like those who come to see your exhibition *Dans la plantation* in Milan to feel?

I can't expect a specific emotion from the viewer or describe what I'd like them to feel. It's often relative and it varies for everyone. As I said, I always do my best for every project. I do so to be at peace with myself, but also, and even more, to offer a pleasant experience to those who will see my paintings once they leave my studio.

Last question, is there anything you can tell us about your next projects and your plans for 2023?

In 2023, I would like to paint more outdoor scenes. Natural sunlight, the way it changes facial expressions, casts shadows on bodies and clothes, and reflects off plants and water... That's what has been inspiring me a lot lately. As for projects, I always discuss them beforehand with the galleries that represent me. They do an amazing job and they will definitely update you on any upcoming projects when the time comes!



– Words by David Alarcón