

**PHILIPPE MAYAUX / PIERRE MOLINIER**

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At first glance, the affinities between Pierre Molinier (Agen, France, 1900–Bordeaux, France, 1976) and Philippe Mayaux (Roubaix, France, b. 1961) do not seem obvious, but rather like an arranged marriage. Indeed, what would a photographer known primarily for his erotic black-and-white images have to do with a painter known especially for his colourful Pop paintings? In theory, not much. In this new phase of his work, however, Philippe Mayaux wanted to confront his art with Molinier's, and the Galerie Loevenbruck has given him the opportunity to celebrate the macabre wedding to which he invites us. "Macabre" because it causes a profound change in our image of our bodies, our desires and our freedom to experience them. "Macabre" because the affinities between the two artists will reveal a terrible divorce between ourselves and our nature.

The works of the photographer chosen by the painter are all part of the same series of photomontages, in which the body is, let us say, reshaped by the artist in search of his idealized, fantasized form. The variability of proportions, the multiplication of limbs (*Curieuse* [Curious], 1965, and *Curieuse [Variante]* [Curious (Variation)], c. 1968), the inversion of faces and profiles (*Hanel 2*, 1967), the "symmetrization" of the front and back (*Je Suis Content* [I'm Happy], 1965) are manipulations and surgical collages that Molinier created in his quest for the incarnation of beauty. This "rearranging" was an artifice needed to correct reality and make the new nature of things plausible. It allows man to become woman, and woman to metamorphose into a goddess with a thousand arms and a thousand legs; the veracity of photography proves it to us—it is right there in front of our eyes (*Les Jeux* [Games], 1966; *Méditation Vampirique* [Vampiric Meditation], 1967). In the same way, the incarnation of this crazy love, at once destructive and creative, extends itself in a stretched-out space/time dimension; in other words, Molinier shows us the same creature in a lapse of time during which several expressions and movements of the body are superimposed in a single image of reification (*Le Triomphe des tribades or Sur le Pavois* [The Triumph of the Tribades or On the Shield], 1969?). Mayaux's choice is obviously not insignificant in view of his series of new paintings, "Les Nourrices" ("The Wet Nurses"). He, too, wants to modify the natural order of the living to reshape it in his image by using the flesh of bodies like genetic clay in a laboratory of the impossible. He, too, multiplies limbs and organs, and twists them around to change and adapt them to new functions, reassembling them as machines or tools, as wet nurses. He, too, believes in the transsexuality of beings and creates hybrids containing both reproductive organs in a single body (*La Génitrice* [The Parent], 2017). He, too, employs the techniques of collage and montage, using a simple game of symmetry to transform the double-helix pose of an odalisque into a strand of DNA that can be multiplied to infinity (*La Nourrice* [The Wet Nurse], 2017). Yet, using the same gestures, Philippe Mayaux describes another era, ours, which leaves no room for the singularity of desire and which sees in our flesh only merchandise and available time. He depicts the fragile place that the body has become, with the destructive forces of the economy passing through it and trying to wholly own us and change us into just a stomach or a sex organ or a screwdriver. He sees the body as the last conquest of the system of objects, the last bit of nature to be invaded. Accordingly, the libertarian sexuality expressed by Molinier is notably absent from Mayaux's exposed bodies, now reduced to simple

primary functions and subjected to exclusive canons of beauty. A strong affinity also emerges from the attraction of both artists to chiaroscuro: a strategy they use to reveal the intimate. In their respective works, the contrasting light diffuses a disturbing strangeness, creating a metaphysical climate that turns the bodies into figurines, dolls or masks, and causes confusion between beings and things.

This intimacy is also reflected in the importance they accord to the model: only one and almost always the same one, in everyday, interior settings. For Molinier, who seems to have a gift for ubiquity, the model is himself, since he is already doubled, and for Mayaux, it is his wife, since he is one with her. This model is not part of the world of other people, who would serve only as pretexts or extras for a project; the model is right there, *is* the project and is recognized as such. And there can be no other model because this is the perfect one. In this way, with this intimacy, the artists make the unthinkable thinkable. Like a guinea pig, the model is used for experiments that would be dangerous for others. Molinier turns the model into a hybrid mannequin, which he dresses according to his most personal, forbidden fantasies, while Mayaux, instead of idealizing the beauty of the model's body, depicts it reshaped and spread on an immaculate tablecloth like a still life, ready to be sacrificed in forced consent like the *Agnus Dei* of Francisco de Zurbarán: "led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he did not open his mouth." It is now an abstraction, a currency of exchange.

Another affinity between these two artists is a strange game of chance and resonance. One of Molinier's portraits shows a succession of faces turning from left to right and metamorphosing (*Les Hanel 1* [The Hanel 1], 1968). Philippe Mayaux, who was not yet familiar with this work, was painting a series of portraits of his wife (*Le Carnaval des Sentiments* [The Carnival of Emotions], 2017), in which the viewer watches a film in slow motion as a movement of the face from left to right deforms it in relation to extreme emotions. The natural beauty of the model's face suddenly turns into carnival masks of emotions.

Paradoxically, the many affinities that exist between their works reveal how much our image of our bodies has evolved in the time between their two generations. Molinier embodied his emancipation and liberation in terms of his sexuality and his choice of "genre", and this liberation of desire was in his time revolutionary in itself, which is what makes this very personal work so iconic today. For Mayaux, the body becomes body as fiction, body as science: cold, dismantled, impersonal, reproducible, dehumanized, with the objective representations of sexuality transformed into quasi-abstract pictograms, explicit images of copulation and mechanized functioning of desire and emotions.

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