

Mireille Blanc  
*Far from the pictures*  
THE PILL ® Istanbul  
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For her new exhibition, Mireille Blanc proposes to take us far from the pictures. Yet it's a set of figurative paintings that welcomes us at THE PILL Gallery's space in Istanbul. The eye can't help but recognize fragments of an unsettled everyday life: an empty yoghurt pot lies overturned, a sweatshirt rests carelessly on the ground, a forgotten Popsicle melts in the hollow of a plate... The rendering of the images bears witness to the same license. There are smudges, discolorations and blurred effects. One senses a rapid, unrestrained painterly gesture, with little concern for faithfully reproducing the real. An emancipated way of making, in keeping with the subjects represented.

In discussing Mireille Blanc's work, it is often said that her relationship with photography serves as a premise for her pictorial works. Close-up shots, often taken quickly with an iPhone, guide the painting process in the studio. They also provide a glimpse into the life of the artist, who is not afraid of the commonplace. These snapshots take us into her kitchen, to a waiting line, to the page of a school diary. Her work, while overtly rooted in the domestic sphere and family life, is just as much about art history, as indicated by the plate number 2 from Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas at the entrance to the exhibition. The combination of illustrations created by the German historian in the 1920s ushered in a new form of visual investigation that some consider a genuine epistemological breakthrough. Following in his footsteps, Mireille Blanc uses photographic images as the starting point for a body of work in which seeing becomes knowing.

It is in this back-and-forth between the grand and the so-called small history that Mireille Blanc forges her path as an artist, without, however, evacuating her role as a mother and her identity as a woman. Hints of her family life are indeed present - plasticine games, birthday cakes - but the most obvious painting in terms of her gender identity is undoubtedly "Emporte-pièce (l'avion)" where, as the title suggests, a kitchen utensil is unexpectedly placed on the tonsure of a female genitalia. The ornate shape of the plane, reminiscent of the female reproductive apparatus, seems to imbue the natural material of the naked body. In this image, gender appears in the form of a mold deliberately placed on a physical attribute, and it is unclear whether the finger holding the cookie cutter is that of a third party or of the artist herself, who, through this gesture, integrates social gender norms. In a more childlike but no less significant vein, the small plasticine sculpture in the painting "Dog" reminds us how matter is molded into form. The "cats" depicted are just as factitious, since they are decorated cakes. In this case, it's the topping that trans-forms, in a rudimentary yet absolute manner, the way we perceive what we're shown.

The pastries, fruits and candies that abound in the exhibition evoke indulgence and pleasure. The painting "Croissant", which belongs to this iconographic group, once again creates a link with the history of canonical art, as it is reminiscent of one of the brioches painted by Edouard Manet. In his 1880 "Nature morte à la brioche", now in the collections of the Carnegie Museums in Pittsburgh, the pastry placed on a blue plate at the heart of the composition, just as in Mireille Blanc's painting, looks astonishingly like a male sexual organ at rest. There's an eroticism in this work that we find in a contemporary, feminized version in Mireille Blanc's work, where the sophistication of traditional French pastry is now giving way to more industrial, artificial pleasures, with packaging and colorants.

A similar sensuality runs through the images of sweatshirts, another recurring motif for the artist. Much like Wolfgang Tillmans' photographs, which show carelessly abandoned clothes, as if after a hasty undressing, the painted garments evoke absent bodies and carnal pleasures. These fabrics are also mediums for words and images, where the history of painting can once again be inscribed. The tracksuit in "Tournesols", for example, features a well-known painting by Vincent Van Gogh, first reproduced in the form of merchandise, then photographed on the sly by Mireille Blanc and finally repainted by her in the studio, in a logic of repetition reminiscent of the Refrain programmatically placed at the entrance to THE PILL gallery, alongside the reference to Aby Warburg described above.

Paradoxically, then, it is through repetition that Mireille Blanc distances herself from images. Firstly, by the distancing of painting, which proclaims its autonomy from the photographic reproduction of reality. Secondly, and above all, through the singular way through which she looks at everyday life. To the well-ordered life of the patriarchal family, she contrasts her freedom and nonchalance, which pervade both her technique and her choice of subjects. Beyond perfect images, the artist confronts us with sensations, impressions, gestures, and embodied flesh. Mireille Blanc does not seek to create an illusion.

Devrim Bayar