

# MY RUG, YOUR ARMS

Antwan Horfee



DECEMBER 16, 2023 - FEBRUARY 11, 2024

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*Text by Antonio Grulli*

Throughout the twentieth century there was a radical attempt to free art from a whole series of elements that were, and often still are, seen as old and outdated: the stylistic recognisability of an artist, for example, is often seen (not always obviously) as banal or as a yield to the market; the very word "style" in the critical field is almost taboo. But not only that: the technique seems something useless, the idea that some artist could have been the "first" to do something, to bring an innovation of a formal or content type, is seen as ridiculous, and the drafting of value scales or judgment between artists immediately stinks of intellectual fascism, just as words like genius, masterpiece, master.... I could go on for a long time but I think I've got the idea.

Art, especially in recent decades, seems (I want to underline the "seems", because looking at it it's not really like that) to have thrown a whole series of its adjectives, of "things" that characterized it, into the treehouse bin of history. And, if it were true that these elements no longer responded to the zeitgeist of our time, they would have remained in that bin. Instead, in the same period, the artists who painted walls, trains, roofs - often illegally - made them their own, presenting them as their strong point.

It's beautiful because a community that is infinitely younger and fresher than the classic world of art is able to see these elements as still alive and vital. A community born around a language so healthy and vital that it does not require official schools to be able to branch out, grow and evolve, indeed: a language so healthy that it grows and develops despite many of its forms having even been considered to be repressed. And I love working with figures like ANTWAN HORFEE precisely because they have brought fresh air to a system ("the mysterious world of contemporary art") that is instead too often anemic, closed and asphyxiated.

So far we have seen how the world of art in the streets is linked to the art of galleries and museums more than we think.

But the opposite is also true... I read in a text of some years ago that Horfee believes that the difference between painting on walls, roofs and trains and art in galleries and museums lies in the illegality of the former: I read a beautiful quote capable of summarizing the concept: "it has to be illegal to fit that bill". Now, here the matter gets even more complicated. Because in reality this concept can and must also be applied to art made of paintings, sculptures, videos, photos, etc. Art is not a gala dinner, it is not a decorative object, it is not something put into the world to console us or give us comfort. True art must disturb, overturn, completely upset our certainties; true art makes our heart and soul bleed, or it isn't art.

To do this it must go beyond conventions, it must be philosophically illegal and break the rules written over the centuries.

True art is made by those who take an element (stylistic, formal, thematic, sentimental, attitude) that had no citizenship in the art world, which was "illegal", and insert it thanks to their own capacity of transforming and sublimating thus making it the new norm.

So that "it has to be illegal to fit that bill" also applies to paintings, sculptures and everything that makes up art today.

Furthermore, let us remember that painting walls or trains is not always punished by sanctions of any kind, even when illegal, just as art in galleries and museums does not always go unpunished: the many stories of legal or illegal censorship perpetrated against works and artists in recent years have demonstrated this; and by censorship we mean actual censorship, as well as acts of iconoclasm or damage to works and artists.

The paintings that Antwan Horfee presents in this exhibition have an immediate psychedelic effect that many have already written about in the past. His classic superimpositions of layers and pictorial techniques are recognisable. The palette is free and very varied, but the artist is able to control it with elegance and virtuosity even in combinations that risk cacophony. And Horfee is truly virtuous, virtuous and fast, even on the most classic support, as canvas is.

You can feel his speed, this need for urgency, even in the paintings. A speed dictated not only by his background in the urban space, but also and above all by a carnal passion for what he does, by a physical love for creating art that leads many artists to want to do nothing else throughout the day.

The first impression is linked to an abstract, fluid, almost gaseous composition, as we observe the paintings evolve into something different, more complex. First of all, the many levels on which he is used to working begin to require each other attention.

This stratification tells us a lot about today and how computer programs have influenced our way of thinking and creating an image. Each of the layers has its own life and its own evolutionary identity, but each one only makes sense in the final composition.

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A composition in which something is always happening. From this first impression of the absence of the referent, some images begin to coagulate and appear in the paintings: landscapes, horses, human figures... And the works immediately fit into a very specific tradition, made up of pictorial genres, with which they dialogue in a destabilizing and conflictual way. But where I truly see the gravitational center of Antwan's art is in his sign and drawing. The line, the Horfee line, is the backbone of all his work. His trait is the source of his energy, that energy which can potentially generate destabilization and conflict. It is a brutal sign, dry but often with a "pixelated" effect - almost as if it wanted to maintain a link with the digital world -, deliberately never affected or elegant, so as to be able to maintain all its strength and its indigestible hardness; sometimes it seems to be done with the left hand (provided that Antwan is not left-handed...). A sign that manifests itself both as an autonomous line and as an outline of color fields in the paintings.

All the rest of his painting is ordered around these lines; they generate boundaries that the color tries to overflow, they cut and divide the space of the painting, they become a guide for the eye of the observer.

And from this attitude, it is no coincidence that beautiful drawings, graphics and fanzines are born, in which the power of his sign emerges even more raw and synthesized. I would like to see one day an exhibition in which Horfee's works are combined with those of a great artist like Amy Sillman; or at least I dream of seeing a fanzine created by them together. Books and publications are a field of art and experimentation in which he involves friends, with whom he also has started up a non-profit cooperative bookshop aimed above all at young people: "art has to circulate in people hands and not on the computers".


But not only that, there are also beautiful videos that he has been making and exhibiting for some years now, in which his pictorial poetics are animated and combined with the temporal dimension.


His entire production through a multitude of languages is the fruit of an attitude in which studio work is the center of everything and the greatest pleasure. A place where you can spend most of your time and at the same time a welcoming space open to new generations. A real workshop but reinterpreted with a contemporary spirit, made of a permeability that recalls artistic practices carried out by figures such as Tim Rollins and his K.O.S. project, in which the involvement of young artists from all social backgrounds is central.

To ensure that the road always remains with him, even within four walls.

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*Antwan HORFEE (Paris 1983) has established as one of the most promising international talents of his generation. His aesthetic is characterized by an "exuberant versatility" of media, techniques, materials and is influenced by the artistic avant-garde movements, by the CoBrA and Gutai groups, by the culture of graffiti writing and by the folkloristic and popular culture of which he is a collector of objects and fabrics. Graduated from the Academie des Beaux Arts in Paris, HORFEE has developed a visual language that fosters an interactive relationship between his imagery and the observer; his aesthetic welcomes coincidences that create a personal, mysterious and contemporary visual language, a corpus that contains figurative and surreal elements combined with gestural abstraction. He has explored all media, from painting to sculpture and has directed and created numerous animated films and immersive experiences. The overlap of layers, the sense of depth, the play of lights and an unmistakable trait generate a distinctive expression; his color palette is powerful and impactful and blends in a time dominated by digital images; and his "imaginary worlds" combining blurred images, scale up details and colorful interferences connect with the era of diversity, noise and uncertainty in which we live. Charismatic member of the historical PAL crew (Peace and Love, Paris) since the beginning of the millennium, he has already established in his early days as one of the most influential writers on the international scene, while his studio research intertwines street practice with a mastery of tools and techniques, as well as his profound knowledge of the experiences of great artists of all disciplines. His works have been exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, at the Ludwig Museum, at the Biennale of Contemporary Art in Lyon and at the Michael Horback Foundation in Cologne. He has also held many solo exhibitions and is represented by top contemporary art galleries such as Ruttkowski68 in Cologne, Ceysson & Bénétière in Paris and Nino Mier in Los Angeles and Brussels. He lives and works in Paris.*

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