

Under the title *Bernard Gaube, Hunimalité* [*Bernard Gaube: Humanimal*] this exhibition shows the Belgian artist taking a critical yet poetic look at our time via a group of recent paintings. The upshot of his interspecies cohabitation is a universalist gallery of hybrid – literally "mixed blood" – portraits, combining human, animal and plant fragments. Gaube's many self-depictions inflict his metamorphoses first and foremost on himself; this personalised representation, however, is no more than a pretext, lending its features to all the kingdoms of the living world in order, as the artist would have it, "to transcribe the presence of the Other".

And while the human feet Gaube shows are putting down roots, their torsos become one with tree trunks, skin and leaf merge, and the stag is endowed with language through speech-bubble antlers. Driven by a desire to speak, the open mouths in these paintings nonetheless remain silent and the bubbles obstinately blank, restored to their pictorial condition of "mute things", as Nicolas Poussin so beautifully put it. And if the images and words in Gaube's compositions interact in perfect reciprocity, it is because their artistic heritage derives as much from the old masters – in this instance Giotto, Goya and Odilon Redon — as from poets and writers like Allen Ginsberg and Michel Tournier.

While their body parts are arranged in the form of narrative snippets revolving around contemporary socio-political phenomena, the paintings leave room for all sorts of interpretations open to wonder and questioning. And just as their

meaning eludes any single explication, the actual painterly matter also offers a form of resistance, through a mix of oils with acrylic ink and airbrush. In the same way that the pictures confront us with the disorder of a world racked by migratory crises, organ trafficking, racial lynchings and climatic and environmental threats, their style seems to heighten anxiety through a deliberately disturbing mode of representation. So, no more than it can be formulated, *Indicible* [*Unspeakable*] cannot subscribe to any kind of visual seductiveness. Consciously distorted perspectives are met with pungent, dissonant palettes that demand time for bringing these gratifyingly refractory paintings to heel.

— *Camille Debrabant*