

GUILLAUME AIRIAUD

My work is based on aspects of image making, and explorations of traditional handcarfts

Born in 1983 in Nantes, France.

Studied Arts at the Academy of Arts in Nantes, and Art History at Nantes's University and Berlin's Freie Universität.

Exhibited internationally in several group and solo shows, and did various collaborations for set design, accessories, art productions, and commissions.

Lives and works in Berlin since 2007.



My inspirations are diverse, but mainly connected to the western world. I use recognizable elements related to arts, crafts, and documents from various origins and times in human history, but I refer to them through the spectrum of intimate views and emotions. It translates in mysterious and playful arrangements of optical illusions, floating devices, and intricate collages. I transform materials and disrupt perspectives, in order to create three dimensional compositions, which seem hovering between image and sculpture. To do so, I developed technical solutions to work with layers: Here some structures of threads operating like woven grids are supports to images or sections of them, there some accumulations of thin wooden plates or translucent materials such as glass, fabrics or tracing paper, serve to segment an image while creating reliefs.

I use a large diversity of materials, and explore a world of know-hows in ways of weaving, making embroideries, stitching, applying straw, wood or leather, sculpting and joining wood or glass, painting, drawing...etc This is where I create optical illusions, the transformation of materials together with the desire to write images, the possibility to play with concepts and stories, and reflect on the aspects of surface and volume. My masks, however, are conceived to mimic morphological features, in harmony with our anatomy. This is where I push my sculptures to their most organic forms, a part of my work which is more directly related to fashion and the body, and connects both my interests for silversmith and tailoring.

My artworks are always produced meticulously, and reveal a real passion for art history and craftsmanship. To me, creating and producing artworks is a process which resists from a system associated with fast production. It is a unique opportunity to dig into traditional handcraft techniques, and to show different yet reliable realities.

DONNE-MOI TON CŒUR

2021

Original chromolithography, color prints, glass

70 x 90 cm

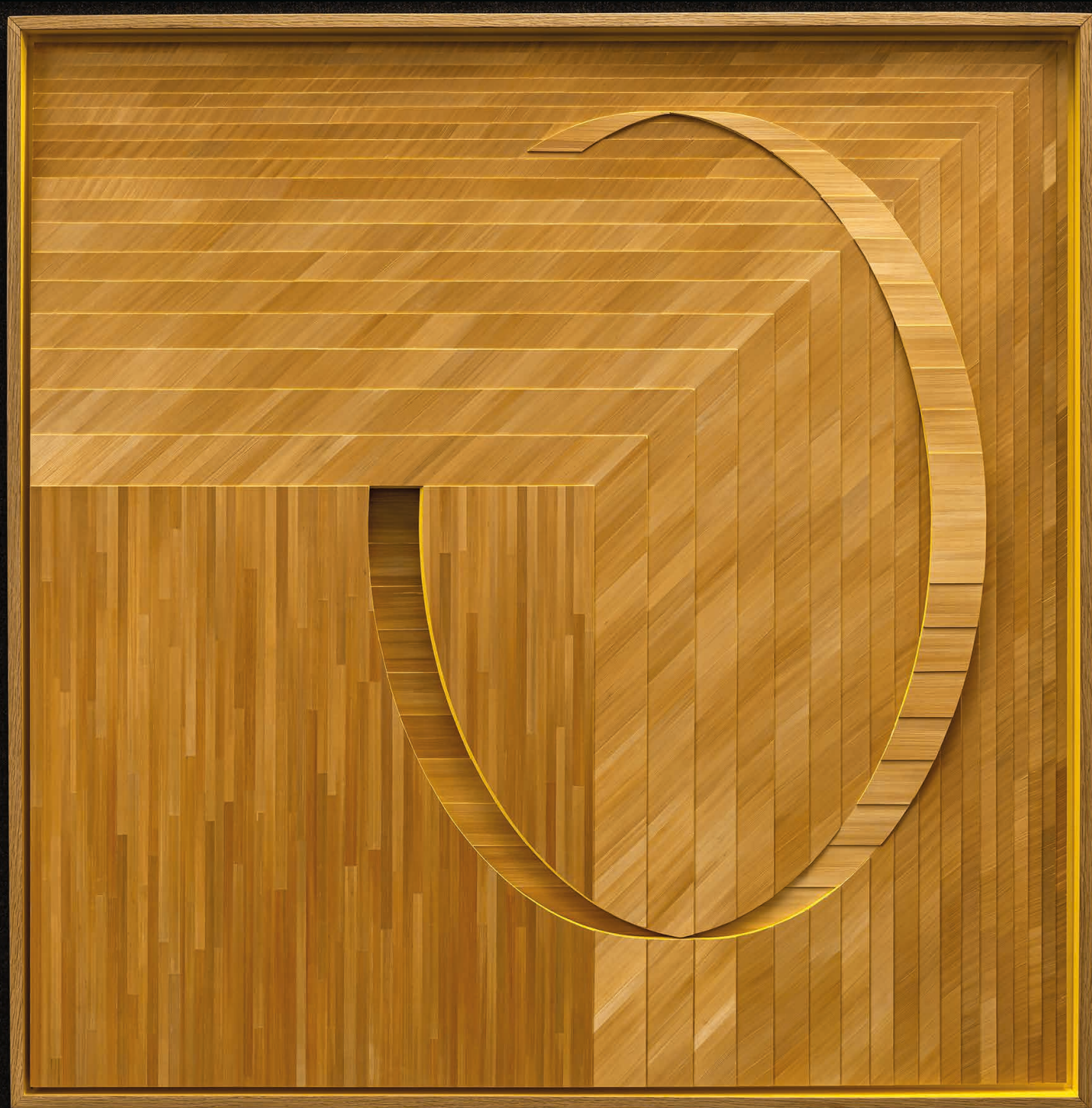


CROSS

2018 - 2022

Straw marquetry, plywood, acrylic paint

118 x 118 x 8 cm



THREADED

2013 - 2022

Prints, drawings, foil, paper, glass, brass

45 x 102 x 20 cm



BLUE KNIGHT

2021

Staw marquetry, brass, wood, print, fabric, thread, roots, glass

64 x 104 x 10 cm

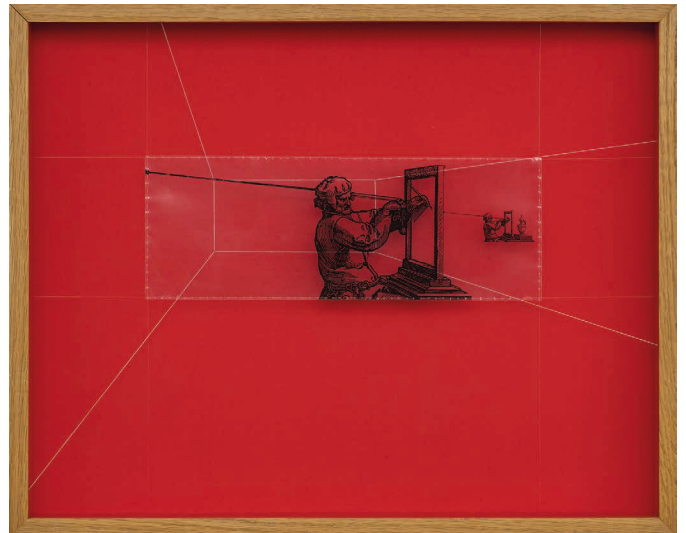


R-EVOLUTION 1 : YOUNG WOMAN WITH A BOOK
R-EVOLUTION 2 : ARTIST AND THE RENAISSANCE

2019

Brass, nylon thread, copy print, Print on foil, thread, fabric

46 x 36 cm



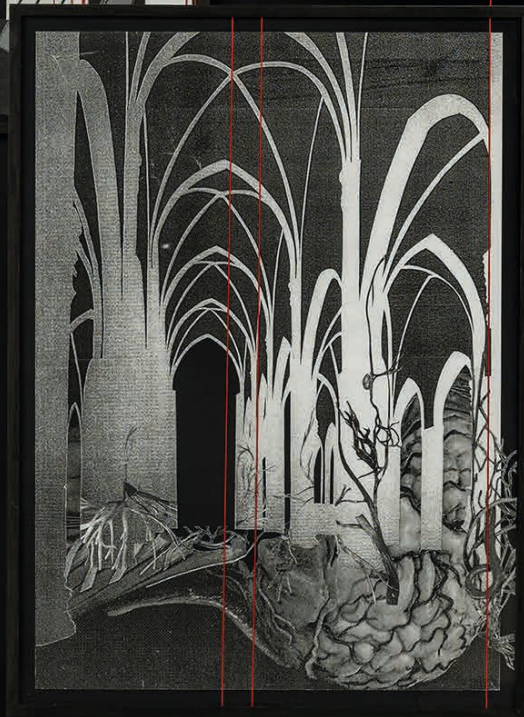
RELIC SERIES

2012-2022

Collage, copy prints, fabric, thread

THE DEATH, THE LIGHT, THE EYE: 32 x 45 cm

THE BRAIN: 45 x 61 cm



LES CHAGRINS D'AMOUR (Triptyque)
HISTOIRE DE COEUR - FOREVER - LOST IN LOVE

2016 - 2019

Canvas, silk-screenprint, thread, paper, Straw marquetry,
nylon thread, plywood, copy print, thread, fabric

36 x 46 cm



MEMORIES

2011

Silk-screen print, organza, laser print

21 x 26 cm. 24 pages

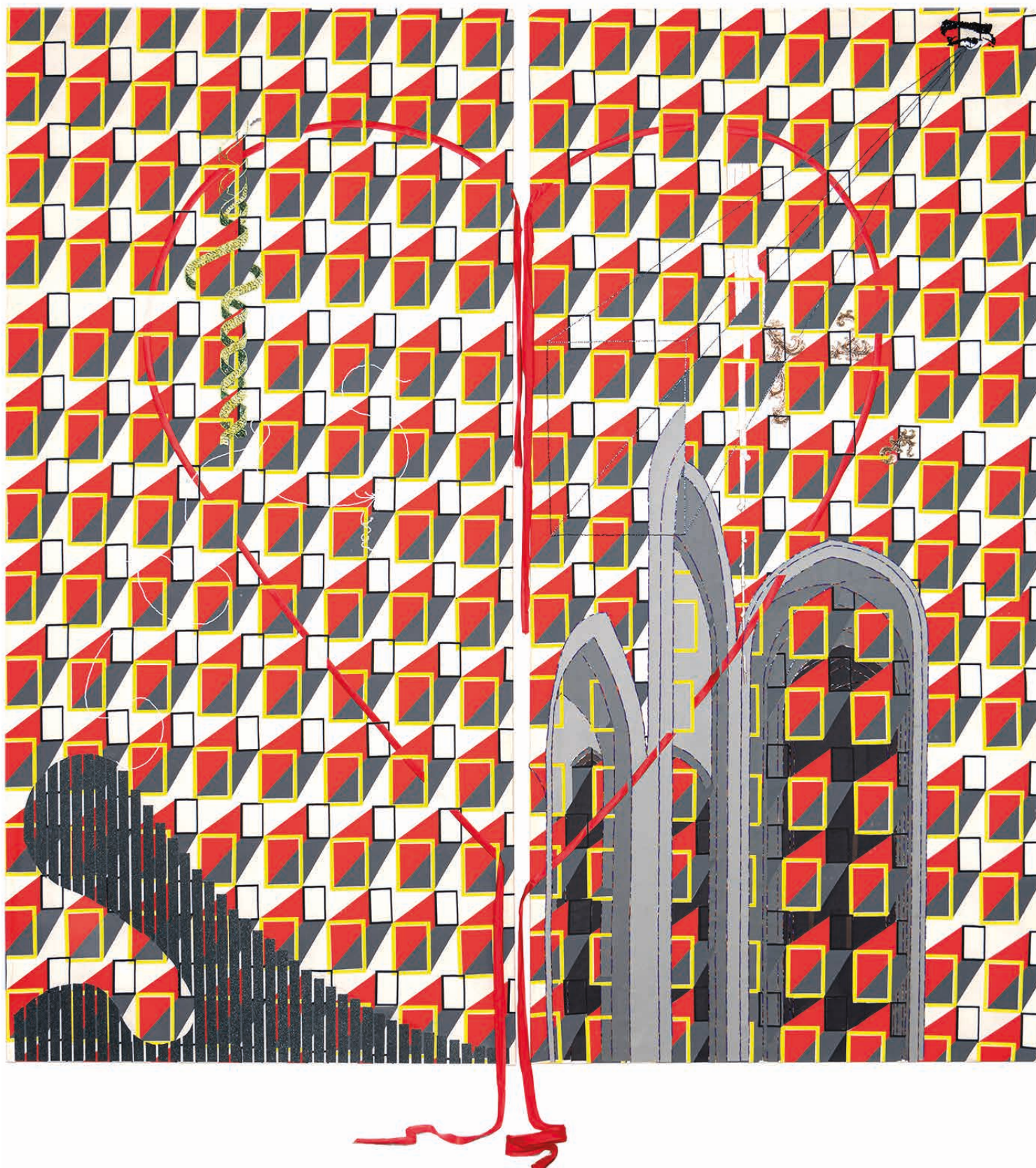


LOVE ME TENDER

2011 - 2022

Silk-screen print, pearls, ribbon, paper, pvc on canvas

270 x 270 cm





STEP BY STEP
2010 - 2022
Wood, organza, fabric
95 x 140 x 20 cm



ELEPHANT

2011

Brass, fur, leather

PIRANHA

2011

Brass, shark teeth, leather



LEOPARD

2017

Brass, fabric, leather





LAYERING OF THE WORLD

CONVERSATION WITH GUILLAUME AIRIAUD

KLARA CZERNIEWSKA-ANDRYSZCZYK

Guillaume Airiaud is not only an interesting artist to explore, but also a graceful and knowledgeable interlocutor. We met in mid-September on the occasion of his solo show in Warsaw, to discuss his practice that focuses on the powerful symbols of European heritage, the mindfulness of handcrafts, and the figure of the artist as an activist.

What are you presenting this time?

The selection I made is kind of arbitrary: it's not completely a retrospective, but I took a variety of works from the past, as well as my newest pieces, to show how my work evolved over the years. The older works reveal my passion for embroidery, textiles, crafts, and the materiality of things that occupied my mind in my mid-twenties. The earliest piece, "Love Me Tender", comes from 2012, but it evolved over time. I realized while doing it that there was no achievement to it, it evolves like feelings do, that's the subject of the piece, and the kind of passion that triggered me when I decided to make this work. This is also the largest piece in the show. I started it with prints, added a ribbon to draw a large heart, and other embroidered motifs. And I continued to add more layers on and on through time.

Only when seeing your pieces in the flesh can one actually be drawn by the architectural motifs that recur throughout the show. Is the idea of perspective, of looking through some historic architectural elements, something that can be traced back to where you come from?

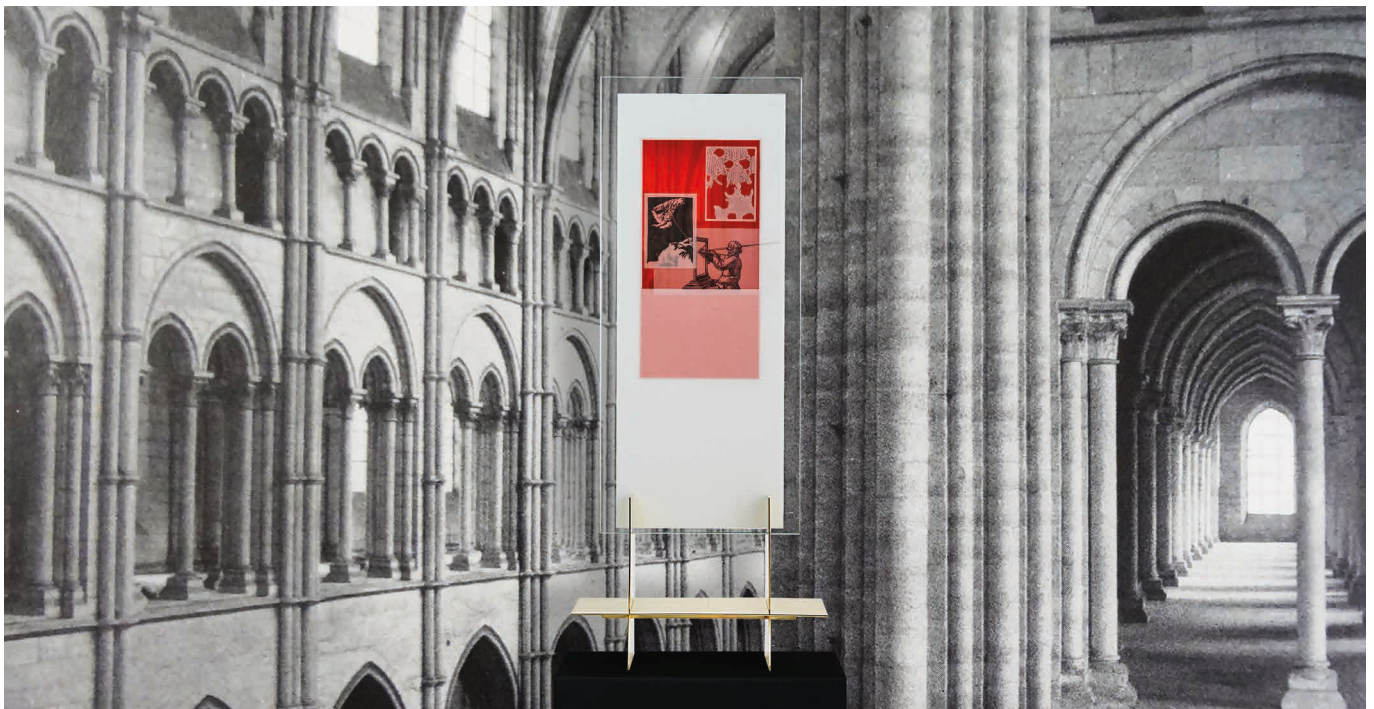
I believe this is not something that refers directly to where I come from, but it represents the civilization and culture I was raised in. When growing up with my family, I did not go to museums very often – art and museums were not very familiar to us. We would rather go around the country and stop on the road to visit old chapels and sanctuaries. However, by bringing this architectural motifs in my works I am not only referring to the historic and aesthetic side of it; on the contrary, I am very much focusing on the contents and meanings of the religion that used to be very strong and powerful, and which reigned human imagination in the past.

The religious motifs you bring up in your pieces have the potential of a mass image, they have already become part of popular culture.

Personally, I rather look at them for their artistic and historical value. Apart from studying art, I also studied art history, and one of the things I was particularly drawn to was Roman and Gothic art and architecture. I discovered that everything is codified there: everything has a meaning, everything is deliberate, and this is something I really love. There are aspects of aesthetics, materiality, and iconography which are fascinating, but you also see that each element, from the mathematical construction of the architecture to the ornaments, is conceived with the purpose to deliver a message. You can basically read an artwork by looking at it.

But when you refer to this art historical layer, do you think this is something intelligible to other people, i.e. the general audience?

It is interesting to notice that most people seem to be familiar with the visual layer of historic art, especially painting, but also architecture, but they do not necessarily understand the symbolic layers behind it. On the other hand, there is this presumption that contemporary art is not accessible to everyone, and that it's essentially conceptual. This conceptual and symbolic aspects are in fact what draws me to religious art, and art from the past. I don't think we should look at something only because it is pretty and familiar. We can also go deeper and read it, and we can learn a lot about our civilisation and history, and get an understanding of who we are.

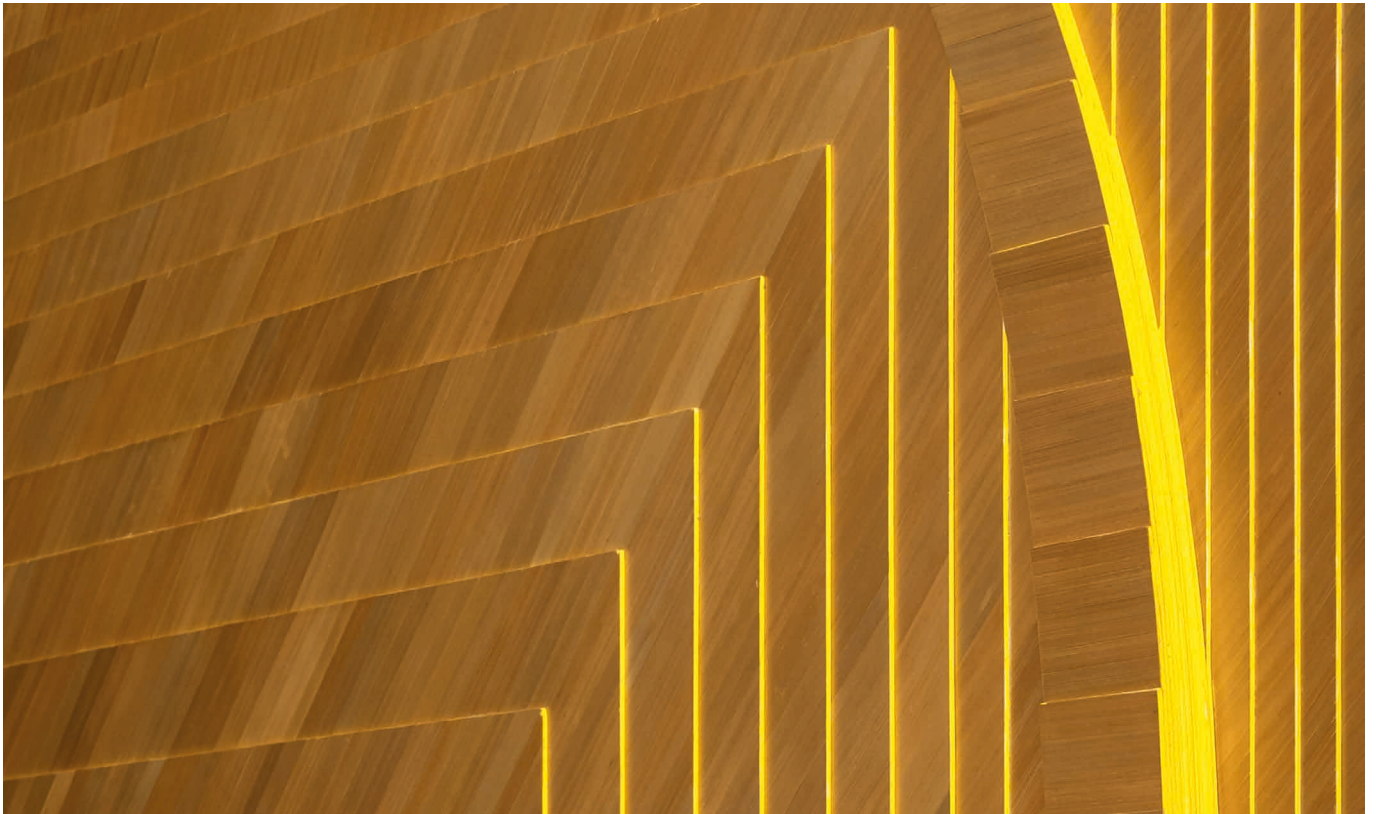


There is a figure of a man – quoted from a renaissance etching by Albrecht Dürer, that keeps appearing in your works. Is that your alter ego?

In a sense yes, because it represents the artist at work, with a tool that helps him delineate the geometrical perspective. For me, such representations, and the role of an artist in general, contribute to define a new way of perceiving humanity. In “Threaded”, I transform the motif taken from Dürer by creating an assemblage. This way, I intend to comment on the evolution of time and the shifting of ideas and motives that lead us to create, and understand our role in society. Renaissance is a major point in the history of western civilization, a revolution in the art and science. It's a complete shift of perceptions, from one devoted to religion, to one devoted to humanism. Still today, we are waiting for an evolution, the power dynamics haven't changed much.

So this is what engages you in your more recent works?

I think so. The clash of civilisations, as well as a desire to be more engaged. The way I want to reflect about it is more visible in my pieces in recent years, although not always in an obvious way. For instance, the image of Jesus can be seen in many ways. Still, for me, as in “Donne-Moi Ton Coeur” from 2021, it is a representation of the patriarchy and imperialism prevalent in our history. It is contrasted in some other recent works, associating the figure of the artist and the figure of the activist. “R-Evolution I” and “R-Evolution II”, from 2019, represent the artist as someone who is an active counterpoint to the system. The woman in the other image, referencing a medieval sculpture that originally held a baby and a book, is another activist figure. I do not really believe patriarchy is the efficient way to make the world function. We see the consequences of it today and throughout history.



Relating to that, can we perceive your beautiful metal masks as something related to that activism? A mask can transform the body, enhancing the performative potential of the one who wears them:

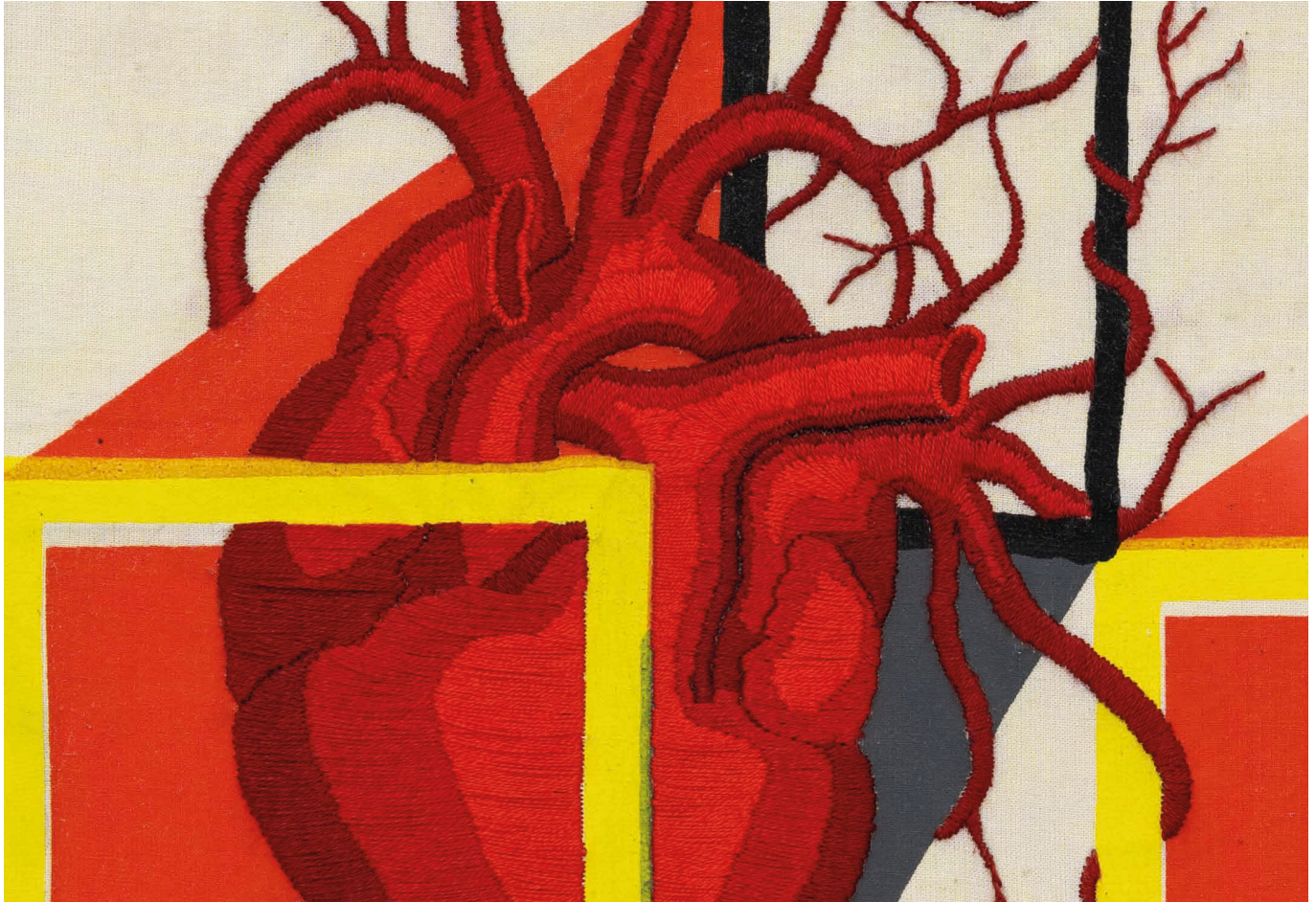
I wanted to integrate the masks within the exhibition, and inscribe them to the narrative. In “Blue Knight”, from 2021, and with the masks, I relate to the figure of a soldier or a knight, so it belongs to both the activist on the one hand, and Jesus and patriarchy on the other. The masks were initially created in collaborative projects with fashion designers and musicians, so they served a different purpose. I did not think of them in a conceptual sense back then, they were accessories. However, they helped me elaborate on some specific craft techniques which I meticulously pursued, and with the metal, also explore something more organic, work with human anatomy, which is not very common in my work.

I also saw that you were giving craft workshops yourself.

In the end, craftsmanship is about the transmission of knowledge from hand to hand. You can study a craft on your own, but you mostly at first need to be guided. This is an extremely important element. Then, every person you teach will eventually do something unique, as they will interpret the things you taught them in a different, individual way, and give new meanings to a material. It's fantastic to think that there is as much diversity in craftsmanship as there are people doing it.

Is the idea of uniqueness also important in your practice?

Yes, of course. I like the fact that it takes a lot of time for the work to develop, even if it is a bit boring at times, given the repetitive gestures. For instance, for the large, embroidered piece shown here (“Love Me Tender”) it took ages to assemble the pearls and beads onto the surface. It was a bit frustrating to take a step back after an hour or so just to discover that you only did two centimetres of the entire surface! However, this is very meditative and honestly quite liberating! While my hands are doing the work, all the thoughts about the daily chores and responsibilities somehow evaporate. I get most creative in these moments, and my mind is filled with progressive ideas.



What made you want to become an artist? When did you realise you wanted to become one?

As a teenager, I started to draw comic characters. I wasn't familiar with contemporary art back then, but knew that this was what I wanted to do. I think I started discovering the contemporary art scene back in high school. I lived in the countryside, but I would go to the city and explore on my own. I then applied to illustration and art schools. Once there, I realised this was where I should be.

And why did you decide to move to Berlin? You have been living there for quite a while now, right?

Yes, I've lived there for about 15 years. When I came to Berlin, I was 24 years old. At that time, I was a bit tossed around, I had a period of doubts about what I wanted to do. However, in Berlin I felt completely free. This city, which survived the Second World War and the subsequent division, gave the impression of a great playground: people could do what they wanted here, be whoever they wanted, which for me at that time was very liberating and stimulating. When I moved to Berlin, I felt that no one was judging me on what to do, how to live, or who to be. It's probably rare, I don't think there are many places like this in the world, and Berlin is so rapidly losing its aura. However, it still offers a lot of possibilities for all kinds of creative people, and it ends up creating a very inspiring diversity.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2021

Solo show LAYERING OF THE WORLD - Curated by Karolina Kikla Wlazło-Malinowska & Marta Czyż - Art Walk Gallery. Warsaw (Pl)

Group show PRETTY IN PINK - Curated by Jan Fischer - Shau Fenster Gallery. Berlin (De)

2018

Group show PARTICULES- Curated by Evor - Le Voyage À Nantes ; L'Atelier. Nantes (FR)

Group show FACELESS - Curated by Bogomir Doringier & Brigitte Felderer - Gallery of the Austrian Cultural Forum. Berlin (DE)

2017

Group show PÉNATES - Curated by Jean-Christophe Arcos - AzOnes. Nantes (FR)

2016

Group show ONLY LOVERS - Curated by Timothée Chaillou - Le Coeur. Paris (FR)

Comissionned exhibition LES MÉTIERS DU TEMPS - In collaboration with Hermès Paris - Hermès Store, 24 Rue du Faubourg St-Honoré. Paris (FR)

2015

Comissionned exhibition CRAFTING TIME - In collaboration with Hermès Paris - Osaka, Tokyo (JP) Seoul (KR) Bangkok (TH) Shanghai (CN) New-York (USA)

2013

Group show DISPOSITION - Curated by Aude Cartier and Henri van Melle - Maison Des Arts de Malakoff. Paris (FR)

Group show LEGENDARY WHEN TOUCHED BY THE HAND OF A GENIUS - Curated by Marta Czyz - Kordegarda National Gallery. Warsaw (PL)

2011

Solo show LOVE ME TENDER - Rise Gallery. Berlin (DE)

PUBLICATIONS

Magazine Miej Miejsce - LAYERING OF THE WORLD - Conversation with Klara Czerniewska-Andryszczyk
Magazine Szum - LAYERING OF THE WORLD BY GUILLAUME AIRIAUD AT THE ART WALK GALLERY - Marta Czyz, Karolina Wlazło-Malinowska

Book - FACELESS - De Gruyter Verlag Editions - Organized by Bogomir Doringier, supported by Brigitte Felderer - In collaboration with Q21 at MQ – MuseumsQuartier Wien.

Exhibition catalogue - DISPOSITION - Conversation with Timothée Chaillou

Exhibition catalogue - A LAPSE OF ABSENCE - By Valérie Leray

Magazine Modern Painters - 24 ARTISTS TO WATCH

LINKS

Website

<http://www.guillaume-airiaud.com/>

Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/ghiom/>

Docu video 9m39s: Layering of the world

<https://youtu.be/3NUcabkmPIg>

Art walk Gallery

<http://artwalk.sztukawmiescie.pl/en/layering-of-the-world-eng/>

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