

Carlotta Bailly-Borg  
*Family Affair*  
Jan 21 — Feb 28, 2021

SONG OF SPIRIT:

To the deep, to the deep, / Down, down! / Through the shade of sleep,  
/ Through the cloudy strife / Of Death and Life; / Through the  
veil and the bar / Of things which seem and are / [...] Where  
there is One pervading, One alone, / Down, down!  
(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*)

NEVVEN is proud to present *Family Affair* a solo show by Brussels based French artist Carlotta Bailly-Borg, presenting a new series of works, where sinuously drawn wire-like forms, knotted and twisted, occupy five tall linen stripes hanging from the gallery walls, reminiscent of ancient Japanese scrolls. Inscribed onto these wires are the artist's signature-style anthropomorphic and non-gendered figures, crawling towards each other or swooshing directionless, in tiny groups or alone, describing a complexly interwoven bodily metaphor and a reflection upon our own selves as isolated beings and our collective nature.

As typical of Bailly-Borg, who effortlessly blends history and cultural references in her multi-media, yet drawing based practice, in *Family Affair* different symbology are richly intertwined. The first and most apparent one is the *knot*, central in every and each one of the works composing the exhibition, the *knot* is a symbol recursive in the most different cultures, modern and ancient, to represent either life or death, liberation or eternal bounds, and nowadays foremost connected to the idea of forming a relationship, as it is the case for the expressions '*nouer une relation*' in French or 'to tie the knot' in English. And, while each painted knot might symbolise a relation in itself, these works, hanging close together, form a group, a family, a

community between themselves. Furthermore, with titles like *Passive-Aggressive*, *Frustrated* or *Passionate*, this body of work, reveals an interest for interpersonal relations, where the *knot* becomes a signifier for neuroses, for the twisted, complex inner nature of human beings. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza defines the concept of *bondage to passions* (or subjection) as the human's "lack of power to moderate and restrain the *affects*". Accordingly to the philosopher the mind cannot command the body, but instead three basic *affects* govern its actions: desire, joy and sadness. These *affects* are at the origin of every possible positive or negative emotion, and consequent action. The bodies that Bailly-Borg draws seem moved by the Spinozan *affects* too, by unrestrained basic emotions, desires. They are twisted by their wanting, as they search for each other, taking over all the space available, their mind a natural extension of their limbs. If in the artist's previous series these anthropomorphic characters were often barely contained by the surfaces' edges, in these works the space they inhabit is further restricted, almost claustrophobic. What at first appeared as wire, as knotted string, at a closer glance morphs into a negative space, a tunnel, a bodily cavity, a uterus. And in this realisation another symbology reveals itself, as in Bailly-Borg's words: "the small figures inside the wires are like incrustations. They are like an echo, a reminiscence coming from a kind of collective memory. Night dreams. They travel like the unconscious. They dig. Pass through these digestive tracts. Wedge into the corners". The bodily implications of the show then become clearer, the spaces these anthropomorphic creatures inhabit belong to a body, and by travelling its cavities and depths they communicate and connect, as *inter-bodily resonances*, blurring the boundaries between the self and the group, as if part of a collective mind, or a collective body.

This concoction of metaphors, eventually brings to mind the definition of *liquid modernity* by Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, "in a liquid modern life there are no permanent bonds, and any that we take up for a time must be tied loosely so that they can be untied again, as quickly and as effortlessly as possible, when circumstances change". In *Family*

*Affair*, Carlotta Bailly-Borg seems to reflect too upon this concept, translating it into images sensuous and grotesque at the same time, showing us these bonds dissected, as in an ancient scientific tableaux, while, at her pleasure, she tangles and untangles the slippery strings of desire, that, woven together, define our nature.

Carlotta Bailly-Borg (France, 1984) lives and works in Brussels. Her practice has taken shape, non-hierarchically, through several media, from drawing and painting on canvas to ceramics, fresco, and reverse painting on glass. In her work she makes a broad range of references collide, crash into, contaminate one another until they form a new pictorial and fictional space. Protagonists of these representations are the anthropomorphic forms she depicts: timeless, effectively depicted as medieval illuminations, non-gendered yet sexual, they are vectors of a narration which is complexly interwoven and richly layered. Bailly-Borg graduated at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Cergy in 2010, and was an artist-in-resident in Le Pavillon, Palais de Tokyo (2013). She presented her work at Goldsmiths CCA, London (2020), Praz Delavallade, Paris (2020), Efremidis Gallery, Berlin (2020), Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2019), Fondation Ricard, Paris (2019), Baltic Triennial 13, South London Gallery / Kunstihoone, Tallinn (2018), Attic, Brussels (2017), CNEAI, Chatou (2017) / Karma International, Los Angeles (2016), Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris (2015), Onomatopée, Eindhoven (2015) and Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2013), among others.

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