

Bachelot & Caron

Porcelaine et faits divers

Prologue

The Grande Halle of BPS22 is bathed in a bluish half-light. A long banquet table seems to suggest a celebration cut short. Cakes, poultry and game, bottles of wine, fruit bowls and cut bouquets are spread out like a frozen orgy: lacquered flesh, monstrous forms, hypertrophied appetites whose domestic grotesque exposes the emptiness and pettiness of consumerist desire. Matter seems poised to come back to life, ready to replay the farce of an impossible feast. Opposite, a wall saturated with more than seventy photographic tableaux offers a very different kind of abundance: that of crime stories, whose violence never appears head-on but emerges through a displaced detail, an incongruous presence, an atmosphere too brightly lit to be innocent, a spotless setting from which unease seeps through, a suspended gesture that calls for a story.

Between the two, a dialogue of excess takes shape. A body wrapped in plastic sheeting is dragged and hidden at the heart of a cylindrical scene reminiscent of a boxing ring. When the perpetrators of the crime resurface, they metamorphose into ceramics, to be sold to the highest bidder, or even given away, free of charge. The performance¹ that unfolds embodies a metaphor of bodies and of the creative act, tracing the genesis of Bachelot & Caron's work, from the meticulous illustration of crime stories to the carnal materiality of their recent ceramics. It addresses the ambivalence of artistic creation undertaken as a couple, the erotico-animal nature of an encounter with the other and with matter, the intimate experience of the duo, but also the wear and tear of bodies that are displayed, that embrace, that struggle for survival in an increasingly complex world. Faced with this staging, blending founding myths and rebirth, the ceramic banquet presents itself as the tangible incarnation of this transformation. With grotesque forms and glazes resembling flesh, each piece becomes the symbol of a disordered, almost baroque embodiment of the creative impulse. By contrast, the wall of photographic tableaux archives fragments of reality - crime stories - like so many popular micro-mythologies frozen in time.

Curator: Dorothée Duvivier

1. This performance by Bachelot & Caron is scheduled for **Saturday 14 March at 8.00 pm** at BPS22. Find out more at: bps22.be/activites/porcelaine-et-faits-divers

Chapter I: crime stories

Louis Bachelot (Algiers, 1960) and Marjolaine Caron (Paris, 1963), graduates of the Beaux-Arts de Paris and the École Nationale des Arts Appliqués respectively, have worked as scenographers and costume designers for film, theatre and opera. As such, they do not simply produce images: they orchestrate stagings. Originally, their photographic work fell within the tradition of crime reporting. As illustrators for *Le Nouveau Détective* - a crime magazine founded in 1928 by the Kessel brothers with the aim of denouncing social injustices affecting the working classes - Bachelot & Caron constructed images through collage, assemblage and the addition of painterly effects, using one of the earliest digital retouching programs, Photoshop. The setting of their photographs is often their home-studio, transformed into a film set on which children, relatives and neighbours are invited to pose - except when the artists themselves are posing in deliberately excessive situations and frozen gestures. Because these crime stories are not reported as objective facts. They are dramatised, theatricalised, and transformed into visual fables combining horror, burlesque and a form of black humour.

The duo employ a certain distance, which allows multiple perspectives to emerge: slight shifts in angle or perspective, blurs or slippages. What they document is not reality itself, but a mirror - sometimes dark, often caricatural - in which our fears, obsessions and desires are reflected, but above all our fascination with violence, scandal and the morbid.

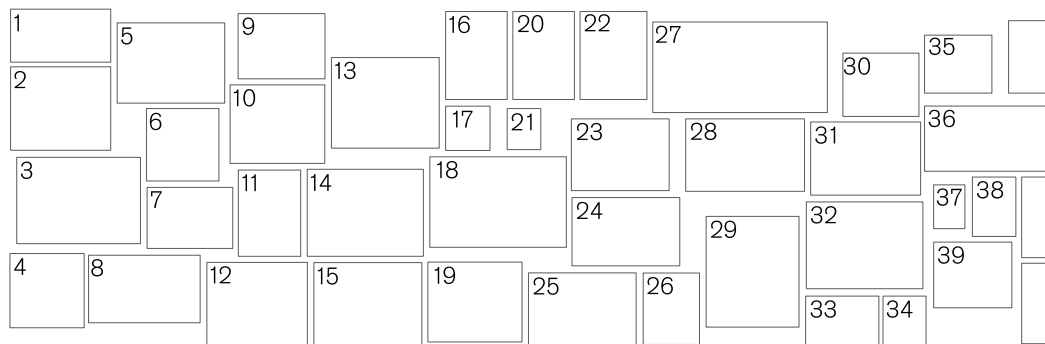
Inspired by the media aesthetics of crime reporting, nourished by cinematic imagery that foregrounds sexualised murder, and steeped in a pictorial tradition that has - since the first biblical crime - ceaselessly represented human passions, Bachelot & Caron's work is brimming with references. Thus, most of their photographic tableaux conceal historical references to Diego Velázquez, John William Waterhouse, Georges de La Tour, Otto Dix, Andreas Gursky or Jacques Monory. But in opposition to artistic elitism, the artists illustrate the narratives of a literary and journalistic genre long mistreated, despite - or because of - its popularity.

Chapter II: porcelain

For almost ten years now, Bachelot & Caron have expanded their practice: photography has been joined by ceramics, performance and installation. Driven by an irrepressible need to return to matter and volume, the artists have transformed the viewer into the spectator of a grotesque banquet, a macabre opera, a theatre of human impulses. The ceramics they produce - organic vases, swollen sculptures, often exuberant works - oscillate between trinket and relic, between domestic object and material evidence of a drama. Saturated with symbols, fantasised violence and almost festive cruelty, they evoke both *The Grande Bouffe* and Rabelaisian fables. Where photography allowed the duo to isolate a troubling moment, porcelain materialises its ambiguity. With it, the artists enter an older, more sensory territory: that of the fragile and the precious, but also of over-ornamentation, of embraced kitsch, of excessive baroque.

By bringing together "crime stories" and "porcelain", Bachelot & Caron create a tension: crime - or at least its fiction - leaves the newspaper or the image to become a lasting object that invites the spectator to inhabit the crime scene, not as a detached voyeur but as a participant in an ambiguous ritual. This shift echoes Bourdieu's formulation that the "crime story" functions as a diversion: it attracts, fascinates, disturbs, and diverts attention from the true mechanisms of violence, power and society. Bachelot & Caron offer no explicit denunciation, but rather a theatre of violence, a catharsis through art, a distorting mirror in which the banal, the ordinary and the taboo become visible, albeit in the form of a plastic and sculptural fable.

Wall of photographic tableaux



1. *Trop-plein*, 2008
2. *River*, 2011
3. *Open Way*, 2008
4. *Le Sommeil*, 2005
5. *Dans Tous Les Sens*, 2005
6. *Elroy*, 2008
7. *Light on*, 2012
8. *Le Bruit du monde*, 2012
9. *Sur La Route*, 2005
10. *Trompe-l'oeil*, 2011
11. *Couronne mortuaire*, 2008
12. *Le Miroir*, 2012
13. *Cléopâtre*, 2011
14. *Thierry Paulin*, 2008
15. *Jeanette*, 2012
16. *Weidmann*, 2008
17. *Freidrich Wattetot*, 2005
18. *Welcome*, 2012
19. *Le Motel*, 2005
20. *Weidmann*, 2008
21. *Marjolaine*, 2005
22. *Weidmann*, 2008
23. *Holopherne*, 2008. Private collection
24. *La Douche*, 2011
25. *Sale Coup*, 2008
26. *Judith*, 2008. Private collection
27. *Le Sacrifice*, 2008
28. *Apocalypse maintenant*, 2008
29. *Ornan*, 2008
30. *Les Joueurs*, 2011. Collection of Florence and Damien Bachelot
31. *La Bastille*, 2012
32. *Belladone*, 2008. Courtesy Olivier Castaing / Team School Gallery
33. *Berceuse Palahniuk*, 2005
34. *La Grange*, 2005
35. *La Vigne*, 2005
36. *Le Dormeur*, oil painting, 2013
37. *Bal de neige*, 2008
38. *Théo*, 2008
39. *Twins*, 2011
40. *Rouge Front*, 2005



Chapter III: drawing rooms

As a tribute to two emblematic Belgian figures, René Magritte and Chantal Akerman, the first drawing room presents itself as a *mise en abyme* of the Surrealist painter's work *L'Assassin menacé*. Each painted object finds its double in glazed ceramic within this crime scene where truth and artifice intermingle, alongside a series of subtle references to elements from Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*. While both works share an interest in the bourgeois interior as a site of psychological tension and in banality as a revealer of drama, here they function as a distorted mirror in which everything is a matter of pretence.

The second drawing room, devoted to the French painter and ceramicist Jean Lurçat and to the Omar Raddad case, likewise proceeds through suggestion, doubt and montage between reality and fiction. Bachelot & Caron fuse two artistic worlds: Lurçat's Edenic landscapes, his symbolic iconography addressing cosmogonic themes and his representations of humanity's self-destruction, with the phrase "Omar m'a tuer", made infamous by this judicial case and widely appropriated and reworked. Going beyond the crime itself, this news item - revealing judicial, social and media tensions - raises questions about evidence, the presumption of innocence, the treatment of minorities, and the role of the media in constructing public scandal.

Finally, a third drawing room is devoted to the famous painting *Olympia* by Édouard Manet, regarded at the time of its presentation in 1865 as the most scandalous nude ever painted. While the subject is among the most classical since the Italian Renaissance, Manet stages a prostitute - Olympia being the nickname of courtesans at the time - whose proud, frontal gaze unsettles the viewer. The model for the painting, Victorine Meurent, herself a painter, became, from the early 20th century onwards, the subject of several novels and numerous works of fiction centred on freedom, marginality and transgression. She is also one of the protagonists of the detective-opera *Victorine* written by the conceptual art movement Art & Language. By reusing

this emblematic figure, Bachelot & Caron remind us that artistic nudity, the female nude and the object of the gaze - historically glorified - are also sites of power, alienation, exploitation and fetishisation. The artists exploit this ambivalence, as many of their photographic paintings stage the culture of feminicide that is present and active across almost all creative fields. Lightened by euphemism, filtered through propriety, rendered acceptable by the beauty or utility of the works in which it is embedded, gynocidal crime¹ acquires social value.

1. Ivan Jablonka, *La Culture du féminicide*, Paris, Le Seuil - Traverse, 2025.

Chapter IV: boxing

Struggle, like crime, has always existed and will in all likelihood accompany humanity until the end of time. The Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions, both founded on the existence of an endless struggle, teach us that human beings learned to kill before they learned to heal. Thus, one of the first confrontations in the Book of Genesis between two combatants - Jacob and the angel - lasted an entire night, each striking blow for blow.

Boxing appears as a theatre in which animality and control intermingle: an enclosed space that reactivates the most archaic instincts - striking, dodging, surviving - while inserting them into a rigorous framework that civilises savagery. In the ring, everything begins like a courtship display, a ritual preceding the impact. This tension gives rise to a true choreography: two bodies circling, warming up, responding to one another in a ballet of feints and combinations. Then comes the sudden, ferocious assault; two bodies locked together until the K.O., when one of the boxers falls. At the heart of this violent dance slips an almost erotic dimension: in the sliding off of robes, the exhibition of bodies, the extreme proximity, the crossing of breaths, the mingling of sweat... Ernest Hemingway, John Keats, Jack London, Colette, Bertolt Brecht, Joyce Carol Oates, Francis Picabia, Michel Leiris, Georges Bataille... were regulars in boxing gyms, fascinated by the mechanics of gesture, the beauty of impact, the vulnerability of bodies, the metaphor of life's struggles and courage. Bachelot & Caron join these writers in a shared quest: to scrutinise human truth through a body under tension, within a space resembling a boxing ring - a place of struggle, beauty, intensity and unease.

By way of conclusion

In a deliberately heightened manner, the work of Bachelot & Caron thus confirms the closeness between destructive impulse and creative bliss, and bears witness to the ambiguity of our relationship to transgression. While this observation is not new - it is a commonplace of discourse on the human soul - its repetitive, cyclical, transhistorical and even cathartic nature speaks volumes about the collective imagination and socio-cultural undercurrents. It is hardly surprising that, after myth, crime has become a source of creative influence. Our irrepressible attraction to *the back alleys of reality*² and the passions they arouse are here reassembled by Bachelot & Caron in a single creative gesture that refuses to separate beauty from cruelty, desire from dread, matter from its ghosts.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes: "And it is all my poetisation and aspiration to compose and collect into unity what is fragment and riddle and fearful chance. And how could I endure to be a man, if man were not also the composer, and riddle-reader, and redeemer of chance!"³ This statement could serve as a subtext for the entirety of Bachelot & Caron's practice. For they do not merely exhibit images or objects: they darn together what is scattered, give form to what remains formless, reorder - without ever neutralising - the accidents of reality. Their work as a duo, marked by excess, collisions and resurgences, acts as an attempt to redeem chance: to transfigure what jars, assemble what eludes us, and give a sensuous coherence to the enigmas that haunt the contemporary world. This is perhaps where the strength of their work lies: in this ability to turn chaos into dramaturgy, fragments into incarnation, and enigma into a space in which the human can still, despite everything, recognise and reinvent itself.

2. Emmanuel and Mathias Roux, *Le Goût du crime. Enquête sur le pouvoir d'attraction des affaires criminelles*, Paris, Actes Sud, 2023. La Fontaine, 2024-2025.

3. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Chemnitz, E. Schmeitzner, 1883.



Thank you to the National Lottery players! Thanks to them, the National Lottery is supporting the production of the *Porcelaine et faits divers* exhibition.