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Mireille Blanc

Lillian Davies

For her work in photography, drawing and painting, Mireille Blanc turns her attention to a certain type of object: birthday cakes, plush fabrics, archived photographs and kitsch souvenirs. The topography of a grandmother's house, as if seen through the eyes of the young protagonist in Céline Sciamma's *Petite Maman*, Blanc also captures the tiny efforts put into keeping an image alive. At the same time, the artist embraces accident and distortion, picturing the mortality of images and the passage of time. Drawing since she was a child, Blanc chose painting at Beaux Arts Nancy, and knew it was at Beaux Arts Paris she wanted to continue. She entered Philippe Cognée's studio the same year as Eva Nielsen, and the two have remained close, participating in the medium's undeniable resurrection.

"Cakes sanctify a moment," Blanc explains when I visit her sun-flooded studio just outside Paris. A true gourmande, for her works on canvas, she plunges into her chosen material: pure, undiluted oil paint. A postcard reproduction of Manet's *L'Asperge* sits on a shelf, a work curator Jean-Charles Vergne (who gave Blanc her first monograph show at FRAC Auvergne), calls quintessentially modern. But Blanc has never painted a salty dish, preferring a sugar high pitch for her contemporary nature morte. The artist's unctuous, small scale *Chateau* (2022), for example, now on display at MO.CO (featured in curator Numa Hambursin's *Immortelle*) replays creamy icing and multicolor sprinkles atop three layers of chocolate baked in the shape of a castle. But it's not just a cake Blanc sees. It's her photograph too. The relic of a single instant, Blanc reprints, retouches and hangs it on her studio wall with two pieces of masking tape. On canvas she cuts to a ratio of dimensions that matches her source image, Blanc paints those two yellowing strips of adhesive, at the top edge of her richly colored snapshot, in a convincing trompe l'oeil. Like drops of water or splashes of oil that enter her other compositions, Blanc uses her brush to distance her work from the photograph. "It's important to be clear this is painting."

Toying with resemblance, Blanc uses the word "brouiller" to describe the way she works with the digital photos she takes on a simple camera phone. Translating to English as scrambled, the term begs for a gourmand metaphor of a creamy plate of eggs, which is sort of what becomes of Van Gogh's iconic sunflowers printed on a sweatshirt and stirred with an Air Jordan printed bag strap. The source image for Blanc's large-scale canvas *Tournesols* (2022), she snapped her composition waiting in line at an amusement park. It's a compositional recipe that combines Blanc's ongoing fascination with the Impressionist painter and her attention to the iconography of the everyday.

Another large-scale canvas *Peau* (2021), Blanc's still life with laptop, is currently featured in *Voir en peinture* at MASC Sables d'Olonne. In this work, the artist paints the inside of a clementine skin, peeled open and rendered nearly the size of a human figure stretched out in the sun. Like her recent charcoal drawings such as *Meringue* (2023), Blanc's composition is overwhelmed with light. As if illuminated by an old-fashioned flash bulb, Blanc's paintings and drawings increasingly push at the limits of exposure, melting line and desaturating color.

Revealing the fragile myth making of family life, Blanc's work also plunges into details of childhood photos and family albums. In *Portrait (robe rouge)* (2019), for example, Blanc grants as much painterly attention to the ruffled dress captured in an archived photograph as to the way the image liquifies under a reflection on the cellophane sheet. Meanwhile, the face of the woman the plastified page is meant to

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protect slips out of Blanc's frame. Her painting, Album 2 (Memphis) (2018) witnesses a snapshot altogether removed from a family album. Blanc devotes her brush to the rendering of an emptied page and corner stickers once carefully pressed under a thumb.

Because if we see the human figure slipping away from view in Blanc's work, it haunts the margins nonetheless. For Elodie au masque (2011), the artist's starting point is a photo of her sister as a child. She paints the young girl's blonde hair in wide strokes and names her in the title, but keeps her face hidden under a paper carnival mask, a metaphor for years gone by. As with a handful of melted wax candles on a sugary birthday cake in 5 ans(2021), Blanc zooms in close on a moment of celebration in order to show us the tragedy of time past.