

Clémence Didion

A world shaped by introspections, dreams and systems.

Hart Magazine gave me a great opportunity and I was very happy when they contacted me, as a person, to talk about a Belgian artist of my choice who could be a great 'next gen' ambassador. Belgium is a country full of many talented artists and then I tried to adapt my criteria both objectively and subjectively: I wanted to share vision and feelings. It was also important for me to link with personal experiences in the way I approach the work of an artist.

Even if our world is growing online and that the Covid -19 era accelerated that phenomenon, I decided to talk about a more discreet artist. A person whose work is more influenced by roots of paintings and literatures theory and essays than computer making process or the post Instagram tools.

Clémence Didion (Belgium, 1989) build up and moulded a dreamlike introspective atmosphere over the time and through different paths, she developed a world, neither closed nor achieved, wherein everything seems to be frozen, just there on purpose to be admired, ghosts and chimeras are intertwining; cagey minds and spectres are still haunting some thoughts, some pasts. In that realm, paused or slow motioned, beings with no identity are gazing, genderless and with no form of uniqueness. They're passing by, sluggishly, from one side to the other side of the frame. They're interchangeable elements. They depict dangling memories. A zany world hinging on roughly painted structures and organic skeletons that are balancing the different arrangements. Despite quietness and order that are ruling there, this environment, similar to its creator, is far from being 'Edenic' and idyllic. It's entropy which coming from the fertile ideas of Clémence that is nourishing her compositions. Motionless cycles, time for our eyes to catch the oversize eyes drawn in coloured hazes. Cartoons alike, they dialogue with interlocking wires and pipes, they kiss rigid tongues and they're staring at nameless objects. Absurdity seems then to reach its pinnacle.

But... What absurdity are we talking about? How can we understand what is challenging and questioning logic and rationality; our own, in an established world; or hers, obeying formal and structural rules? That's the key moment we really access the Clémence's work. Whether two or three-dimensional, pencil or oil, this fictional territory takes us on a journey into her memories, her childhood and her obsessions. Sometimes Japanese alike, sometimes paced with throbbing music or rousing rhythms. In respect of the formal side of her practice, Clémence brings us into a work full of symbols that borrow certain aspects from the Belgian artists Walter Swennen and Leon Spilliaert or the French artist Odilon Redon ; a world that disregards any procedure. A world wherein spontaneity and instinctive language learning are integral part of the artistic process: way more important than the final treatment.

The work gradually evolves organically to open up new formal questions. The main focuses and important questions for Clémence are linked to her own life, her past experiences and the way she could take lessons from her introspective sources. She like to explore the past and share ideas and opinions with artists and people she really does admire. In the manner of the Canadian artist Philippe Guston who spent his life to challenge his own existence and who found way to express his concerns such as the Ku Klux Klan activism, personal distresses, killing the boredom of loneliness or suicidal feelings with a comic strips and naive language. She also mentions quite often the Polish artist Maryan S. Maryan (pseudonym of Pinchas Burstein) as a great inspiration: a post-expressionist painter who explored and pushed the limits of human faces and bodies representation with no limits.

Regarding the Armen Eloyan, like a continuous hallucination, the respective subjects chosen follow one another, draw their inspiration from the same places and are shaped over time to finally arrive at a different result. The forms become rounder, more colourful and more animated.

In a waking trip that looks like a tale of a contemporary Eugene Ionesco, Clémence is inviting us to leave the childhood and getting closer from a heavier reality; made of trials and mistakes, so as to draw near the vulnerability of a steady existence: as a reverberation, a resonance of our troubles and of our misunderstandings.

Clémence is really affected and concerned by those matters. She reads a lot of psychology and psychoanalysis. She's fascinated by the She evokes Carl Gustav Jung, a Swiss psychanalyst, she talk about with importance. It's important to face the facts: Jung was a great admirer of the Odilon Redon's work and Federico Fellini, one of her favourite filmmaker, was himself highly influenced by Jung's dreams analysis essays and theories She then developed 'natural' bonds with writers and artists who play with the images and the vocabulary of the subconscious. Jung liked to describe his practice as an "active imaginary", in other words a practice allowing a genuine self discovery inextricably linked to a full perception of life. She really like to let images filling our minds instead of forcing them. She said that "She would like to have a stronger command of that language. To understand better how to make those instantaneous shapes to appear". It would be a perfect way for her to gain strength and conviction in her drawing and painting act.

As you certainly understood, Clémence Didion is an artist introspecting a lot and always trying to know more about herself. Thanks to that slow and challenging process, over the time, she achieved to change a lot. She was more taciturn, spent a lot of time on her own and didn't really want to share collective experience within the field of art. Before, despite of her multiple backgrounds and experiences before enrolling La Cambre and starting a new course at almost the age of thirty, and as a student, Clémence saw the shows and exhibitions as, she said, *"an opportunity to go through, a way to become a pro and to feel comfortable with my professional choices"* but, however, she never really felt confident with herself and with the simple idea of displaying, revealing her art works with the audience. For her, it was still a demanding exercise and required efforts to overpass her fears and doubts. From a distance, her practice and the way approached it seemed a bit rambling and she didn't especially want to share views and explanations about it.

Today she opened up her mind and had many good experiences with exhibitions and groupshows such as the WunderWall project we worked together alongside PlusOne & Sofie Van de Velde and, more recently, she also took part to *"Le Souliers Rouges"* with four other artists at the Moonens foundation, in Brussels. In that respect Clémence told me that she doesn't want to think about specific expectations from new shows and projects. As she said me amused: *"I want, 'selfishly', the new projects to come organically and still enjoying a lot of fun of it and gain a lot of personal satisfaction"*.

Now, Clemence graduated and she stepped the art world with her graduation show, in September 2020 and then she started the training to become a visiting art school lecturer and professor. She chose that direction because of several reasons: the first one is probably link to the ongoing Covid-19 situation that seems to never comes to an end. It allows you to take time to develop yourself while testing new practices such as performances and art scenography. Clémence always liked to study and to be related to an academic background to keep on her projects. That's a chance for her to do so while operating a strong transition for her future. It allows her to meet up with people from both the art world, the art schools and students: she like to share views and opinions with people from the young generation who are providing her with fresh and spontaneous insights. Aside, it's also a perfect context to position herself on the map and to take the right distance from her practice.

In parallel of her courses, she took and still taking a lot of time to develop strongly her skills in the different medium that constitute her body of work: drawing, painting and ceramic sculpture.

Clémence discussed it with me starting with a quite funny anecdote: she decided, first, to naturally keep on with her drawing skills. Not because she really wanted to but merely because the lockdown that prevented her to attend her ceramics classes and because of the cold winter that reminded clearly how cold was her painting studio. She unconsciously decided to buy a new stock of paper and adequate material to focus on it.

She operated to some important changes those last months. For example, she started to add a 'character' within her composition make sure to have couples instead of standalone entities. A natural expression of loneliness and lack of social exchanges (editor's note: She's not living alone but as for everyone forced to lockdown and to stop meeting people spontaneously, the context was really trying. Mostly at the very beginning of it). As, lately, she found herself obsessed with the decorative elements of tarot games and playing-cards, she expanded her palette and her vocabulary with new shapes and the presence of new elements to reinforce the compositions. But one of the most relevant change she made was probably to start drawing compositions without any frame; such a particular element that made her compositions so singular. At the contrary, in respect of her painting practice, she radicalised it. She synthesised it. With a strong will of using simple gestures, bold lines and more distinct colours. She also tries to bring more material on her canvas. She wants people being able to feel it more. At another level, she wants also to distance herself from an excessive figuration and will work on 'going through abstraction' with reducing the number of geometric pieces of information.

Clémence told me that it was, according to her self judgement, next to her sculpture and ceramic approach that she operated to the most crucial changes and evolutions. She planned to scale up and think about her sculptures as independent elements of more important installations: the different ceramics modules will be part of larger structures. She wants to develop her 'systems' and make them more unique and recognisable using specific colours and new techniques. She wants to interlock and slot them, offering the audience different levels of reading that would reveal the multiple layers of her personality. As a synthesis of her expectations; "I would like my whole body of work could come from different backgrounds while being part of the same mythology, the same language.", she said.

In the future, she intends to keep the right balance between her career as an artist and as art teacher. She would like to take a lot of time to read even more essays and material in regards of psychoanalysis and make sure to go even deeper in her researches. She would like to get closer from the perfect harmony between body and mind, find more answers to matters questioning art, education and philosophy: developing herself out of her art, out of her comfort zone. Probably a good way to gain new tools that will allow her to reinforce her 'active imaginary' competences and to be in line with another great influence for her, Siri Hustvedt who wrote the essay that Clémence recently read, *"The Delusions of Certainty"*.

To conclude, Clémence Didion also genuinely believes that fate and life encounters are critical for her and that she will always try to change organically: "I am too afraid of disillusion. I don't want to expect a single thing. I mean, not in concrete terms. Of course, as anyone else, I have personal expectations but I don't want to bond it with my doorways or my forthcoming projects. I want to keep my life full of surprises."