

# Wilde

## PRESS RELEASE

Léopold Rabus

*Monde en digestion*

08.02. – 12.04.2024

BASEL

Wilde is proud to present the exhibition, *Monde de digestion*, by Neuchâtel artist, Léopold Rabus. This is the artist's second exhibition with the gallery and his first in Basel.

This exhibition is a profound foray into the theme of digestion, a motif that weaves a complex narrative transcending the traditional themes of art history. Throughout his oeuvre, Rabus exercises his freedom to redirect our gaze from the conventionally beautiful to the periphery, turning the ostensibly ugly into something alluring. He challenges the norms that dictate our sightlines, urging us to see what we choose to see, not what is presented to us.

In his latest collection of works, Rabus boldly spotlights the oft-ignored processes that succeed consumption. In Rabus's vision, still life painting, traditionally a celebration of food's visual appeal, pivots to confront the reality of its aftermath. His artwork—featuring elements such as a toilet-resembling ceramic frame and humanoid figures crafted from food scraps amidst everyday scenes—challenges viewers to contemplate the often-hidden and socially shunned aspects of digestion (*Monde en digestion series* and *Le Sylvestre*).

The rich tapestry of still life painting has evolved dramatically from its inception in ancient times, through the symbolic Renaissance and the dramatic realism of the Dutch Golden Age, to the expressive endeavors of modern and contemporary art. This genre has consistently served as a medium for deeper meanings and philosophical ideas, mirroring society's shifting values and artistic temperaments.

Historically, the art of still life has subtly engaged with the theme of digestion, a motif that traverses the sacred and the profane, with artists across eras exploring this concept through various lenses—from religious symbolism to allegorical representations of moral lessons, and the fleeting pleasures depicted in still lifes. As modern art juxtaposed the primal aspects of humanity with cultural refinement, digestion has remained a potent metaphor for the balance between our physical realities and our loftier aspirations. Rabus's work serves not only to explore these themes but also to redefine them, employing “Belgian humor” to push the boundaries of how we perceive beauty and the cycles of life, compelling us to acknowledge and find beauty in the transformation and decay inherent to our existence.

Adding another layer to this theme, Rabus introduces worms, symbols of decomposition, into his paintings (*Lombrics à la baignoire* and *Lombrics à la villa rose*). These creatures, essential to the natural process of breaking down organic matter, are depicted within the context of the exhibition, furthering the narrative on the cycle of life. By featuring them, Rabus accentuates the importance of these organisms in life's continuum, highlighting their role in the renewal of the earth and inviting viewers to find beauty in decay—a process as natural and significant as life itself.

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Léopold Rabus's artistic exploration of liminal spaces, those that exist between the rural and the urban, epitomizes his endeavor to elevate the overlooked and infuse the ordinary with profound significance. Through the motif of digestion, he delves into transformation and assimilation, imbuing these transitional spaces with depth and inviting subjective interpretation. Rabus's mastery lies in his ability to create a dialogue between the artwork and the viewer, prompting a personal reckoning with what is typically disregarded—be it the scattered remnants of daily life or the abandoned objects within our midst. He deconstructs and reconstructs these elements, challenging us to see beyond the conventional and discover beauty in the unexpected.

The exhibition is not just a showcase of painterly prowess; it is a call to re-envision our surroundings, to recognize the poetry and beauty in the world that surrounds us, often hidden in plain sight. By bringing the peripheral to the center, Rabus challenges viewers to find significance in what is typically overlooked or undervalued. This collection is a poignant reminder of the natural over the sanitized, the candid over the concealed. It represents a form of aesthetic rebellion, integrating the sacred and the profane and provoking a deeper contemplation of the cycles that govern nature and human existence.

## Biography

Léopold Rabus was born in 1977 in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. He studied at the Académie de Meuron in Neuchâtel and at the Ecole d'arts appliqués (EAA-CIFOM) in La Chaux-de-Fonds before joining the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. He works and lives in Neuchâtel.

Léopold Rabus's practice specializes in oil paintings and installations, mainly inspired by his immediate surroundings in the rural context of his hometown. Growing up in a family of artists, he was immersed from an early age in a world of surrealism that now characterizes his oeuvre. Rabus's figurative work depicts a reality in a spooky yet witty character. His paintings often portray individuals and animals in gloomy scenes where the boundaries of fantasy and reality are blurred. Essentially, the artist reflects on the way we qualify the living and aims to represent its essence in a way that language can't, thus creating hyper-realistic pieces that are open to interpretation.

Rabus's work was awarded the Eidgenössischer Wettbewerb für Kunst and the Swiss Art Awards in 2006 and the Premio Lissone in 2005. In 2023, Rabus is opening a duo exhibition at the HAB Galerie (Nantes, France). Other institutional exhibitions include those at the Musée d'art et d'histoire de Neuchâtel (Switzerland), Museum Langmatt (Switzerland), Carré Saint-Anne, espace d'art contemporain de Montpellier (France), Kunsthalle Wilhelmshaven (Germany) and Museum voor actuele kunst (The Hague, Netherlands). Recent group exhibitions include those at the Weserburg Museum für moderne Kunst (Germany), Centre d'Art Contemporain Walter Benjamin (Perpignan, France), Elgiz Museum (Istanbul, Turkey), MONA (Hobart, Tasmania, Australia), Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (The Hague, Netherlands), Palais Enzenberg (Schwaz, Austria) and Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Lissone (Italy). His works are featured in several public art collections, including the Museum zu Allerheiligen (Schaffhausen, Switzerland), Frissiras Museum (Athens, Greece), Gemeentemuseum (The Hague, Netherlands), Musée d'art et d'histoire de Neuchâtel (Switzerland), Museum of Old and New Art (Hobart, Tasmania, Australia) and Mudam Luxembourg (Luxembourg).

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