

Wilde

PRESS RELEASE

Valentin Carron

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WILDE | GENÈVE

The term "cretin" first appeared in 1754 in the first Encyclopedia to describe the condition of Alpine populations suffering from iodine deficiency. Inhabitants of inland regions far from the sea, these individuals were recognizable by their apathy and goiter. With the development of tourism in the 18th century, European travellers associated this condition with the Valais region, especially the lowland villages between Martigny and Sion. Today, we know that the phenomenon extended well beyond Switzerland to the Andes, but it was Valais that can boast of having given this, albeit pejorative, word to the French language. Since the decision to add iodine to salt, thankfully, "cretinism" has been eradicated. However, centuries of fantastical theories have left their mark on the minds of people.

Valentin Carron has accustomed us to confront vernacular elements—be it Christian art, decorative art, or modern sculpture—with contemporary art, reinterpreting familiar symbols that escape dominant culture, many directly stemming from his native canton. His decontextualized, enlarged, and perplexing objects, which cast doubt on the authenticity of their meaning, have been erected as monumental sculptures, including in front of Art Basel's Messeplatz in 2009. Falling under appropriationism, some of his works have been accused of plagiarism. Today, Valentin Carron is more engaged in painting and collage while continuing his sculpture work. His recent pieces could be accompanied by the description of "cretins" given by Maurice Chappaz (in "Le portrait des Valaisans en légende et vérité," 1965): "I see the idiots again. They were enormous, dragging themselves with faces gnawed like bark. They tried to speak, but only giggles and bellowing passed their lips. There was Lôca the cretin, Hat the cretin, and the big cretin with a cigar. More mysterious than them, the one only taken out at night to walk towards the river, with his head enclosed in a sack. He had the face of a horse." Valentin Carron presents here less a gallery of portraits that might venture into voyeurism or critique of the viewer, but rather a representation of the energy that persists from these individuals who lived in suffering, sometimes dying very young, mistreated by the society of their time. In this spotlight, supple and voluble gestures combine with vibrant colors and collage of various scraps salvaged from previous creations. Now is the time for the pleasure of creation, the desire to let mood, material, and free expression speak.

As a leading figure in a certain renewal of the Swiss art scene alongside Andro Wekua, Mai-Thu Perret, and Vidya Gastaldon, Valentin Carron, with his new productions, moves away from the highly anticipated concept of appropriationism to put experimental workshop work back at the center of his production: "In previous productions, I knew the result

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before the end and I am no longer really interested in that," he explains. No more sculptures resembling ready-mades, no delegation of craft to a third party or company—now there is room for the trace of the hand, intellectual wit, and the demiurge's breath, together posing no less questions about our representations. With integrity and obsession, Valentin Carron revives the marginality of these forgotten individuals, creating portraits of anti-heroes, these "Innocents" as they were sometimes called. Gone are the fake, imitation of the real, trompe-l'œil, and sarcasm, in favor of a form of authenticity captured on the spot, in an excess of means. Thus, the artist becomes the humble witness of a disappointing history of his origins.

Text by Karine Tissot

Biography

Born in 1977 in Martigny, Valentin Carron lives and works in Vernayaz in the canton of Valais. Educated at the Canton School of Art in Valais (ECAV, currently EDEHA) and Lausanne (ECAL), he began his career in 2000 with a series of quickly noted exhibitions. In 2010, the Palais de Tokyo dedicated a solo exhibition to him, marking his international celebration. Three years later, he represented Switzerland at the 55th Venice Biennale.

Carron reappropriates, copies, and diverts objects from Valaisan culture, often considered the embodiment of Swiss identity. He imagines replicas in synthetic materials like polyester or fiberglass, imitating wood, concrete, or bronze. Carron thus plays with the notion of authenticity and questions the weight of tradition and the values attached to certain cultural creations.

Whether Valentin Carron is invoking archetypes from popular, artistic or religious iconography, he does so with irony and distance, but also in a critical spirit. Closer to a pastiche than a celebration, his sculptures highlight the workings of the symbolic mechanism that drives human production.

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