

EXHIBITIONS

Philippe Charles Jacquet

Philippe Charles Jacquet (b. 1977) paints mysterious twilight landscapes, set in the estuaries and coasts of the Rance Valley in the Brittany region of France. At the same time, he explores the universal realm of the imagination, as was beautifully demonstrated in his exhibition at Axelle Galerie in New York City (September 24–October 25, 2015). The title of this show, “Les Gens du Canal” (the people of the canal), calls attention to the tiny figures—usually solitary—that frequent these haunted precincts.

In *Autoportrait* (all works 2015), Jacquet identifies himself as the miniscule figure standing on the quay, silhouetted against a soft, blush-colored sky. The quay is an odd structure, with old-fashioned stone houses and steps leading down to rippling water, where a rowboat floats. The boxy yet elegant buildings in Jacquet’s oeuvre have a gratifying solidity, although they seem a natural part of the surreal calm of these dreamscapes. In “Poetry,” Marianne Moore described poems as “imaginary gardens with real toads in them.” In that sense, Jacquet’s paintings are imaginary landscapes with real buildings. Although he is self-taught as a painter, he spent twenty years working as an architect, having graduated from the École Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs in Paris.

Jacquet builds up an intriguing iconography from picture to picture, an iconography that seems both private and traditional. In *La Chapelle*, an old stone church perches above a rocky beach. Three boats are visible: one turned up and against the rocks; another, empty, at the surf line of the water; and a third,



Philippe Charles Jacquet, *Le peintre du Canal*, 2015

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approaching, with a single figure standing in the prow. This picture could be a riff on Arnold Böcklin's *The Isle of the Dead* (1880–86) or a backdrop for a production of Richard Wagner's opera *Parzival*. The rowboats Jacquet features have their own iconographic associations with the vessels that carry individuals across the sea of life, as in Thomas Cole's 1842 series *The Voyage of Life*.

In Jacquet's *Le Moulin*, the structure he depicts is an old fortress-like mill, looming up in front of a single figure standing in a rowboat. The mill casts a perfect reflection in the placid water, raising questions about art and illusion and perhaps paying homage to René Magritte. In vertical-format works such as *Le Moulin* and, especially, *Le Hollande*, the scale of the principal structure can seem oppressive. *Le Hollande* shows the dark bulk of an old ship, observed by three tiny figures on the shore. The ship casts a dense shadow over the water and nearly blots out the sky.

Sky and water play significant roles in two of the loveliest paintings in the exhibition. In *Retour d'école*, an appealing old building—with two wings under a mansard roof—occupies a rocky promontory in the middle of the composition. The indistinct backdrop merges cliffs and sky in a mauve-tinged haze. Below the dead-flat horizon line lies a blue-green expanse, painted with ambiguous brushstrokes that suggest both rippling water and shore-side grasses. A boat lies at the foot of the cliff, and a small figure stands waist-deep—either in water or in grass—gazing at the pale gold light coming from two of the building's windows. The title evokes the idea of a memory picture, of a place known well in youth but now a phantom. The influence of the Symbolists, especially the refined domestic mysteries of the Belgian Fernand Khnopff, seems to be part of the art historical backstory.

The title of *Le peintre du canal* also hints at veiled autobiography. There are two tiny figures in the composition, one looking out of the lighted window of the handsome old stone house and another walking along the horizon, silhouetted against a pale rose sky. The picture is an exercise in doubling. There are two spindly trees on the far shore, two boats—one sitting under a canopy near the house and the other floating, angled, in the foreground. The house itself is perfectly reflected in the still water, which picks up a roseate tint from the sky. Jacquet's skills as a colorist are particularly evident here, where the teal and purplish blue of the water shift imperceptibly into the warmer colors near the horizon.

Without belaboring the conceptual aspects of art-making, Jacquet explores the nature of art and illusion in the borderlands between dream and reality. Axelle Galerie, 472 West Broadway, New York, New York 10012. Telephone (212) 226-2262. axelle.com

—Gail Leggio