

# VERSIONS

## NATHANAËLLE HERBELIN

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Nathanaëlle Herbelin grew up in a small village in central Israel between a French father and an Israeli mother. It was in Tel Aviv that she learned painting, alongside Russian and Ukrainian artists who arrived there in the 1990s. From this land, she keeps her taste of the desert, silence and culture of the Negev Bedouins, as well as a close link with nature. Her work as a whole is underpinned by a contrast between a great tension and a certain sweetness. And her melancholy does not exclude, here and there, traits of humor and a certain lightness.

A few years ago, Nathanaëlle Herbelin was questioning the possible connection between her painting and photography. Today, that questioning has given way to new paradoxes and new ambiguities. She is hunting petty, commonplace episodes in reality. Once found, she examines them on the surface of her paintings in a mixture of mundanity and poetic transcendence, which is usually encapsulated in a dash of faint wit. Her most realistic pictures are the most ambiguous, for example the large interior inspired by Georges Perec's *Les Choses*, which is also the library in an apartment lent by a painter friend. It expresses her fascination with the idea of one's own house, somewhere between tangible presence and fictional world.

Recently, odd scenes have appeared in her pictures, like comments on what she might have done, had she been an abstract painter. They are hijacked memories of the school of fine arts: unrecognizable views of exhibition sites, nooks in studios, a trestle whose shape conjures up a metal module, an easel, or the remains of an installation, a black box for showing videos, which resembles a monochrome in front of dark red walls. Just a few months older, a small still life showing a piece of flattened cardboard, found on the ground in a street, is not an abstract sculpture, but one of those protective things that you put around a takeaway coffee cup to stop your fingers being burnt.

At the same time, and running counter to this research—or rather in exactly the same vein—Nathanaëlle Herbelin has embarked on a new adventure: portraits of strangers, made haphazardly from encounters in the street and in the rooms of a museum, and portraits of close friends who have posed for her, either alone or in groups, they, too, the receptacles of stories we shall never know. To start with, they looked away, then, increasingly, they now face their present and the oldfashionedness of painting. She kneads her motifs by making variations over quite long periods of time, as if to exhaust them, almost to make them vanish in colours and forms. For the sketches which have the power of first experiences, she often paints on small wooden boards. This material is not afraid of the comings and goings of the image in time. It is the moment of the game. Then she starts a prepared canvas, larger in format, looking for the right gesture, the candid movement, and the exact colour—she has even painted a collection of hands and gestures. Her drawings, mingling in sketchbooks with a few images cut out here and there, are simple notes; the real research takes place at the tip of a brush. From time to time a painting is abandoned in favour of another, because it was starting out in a wrong direction, then taken up afresh, as if like a new path. This is the case, for example, with these swimming pools, one of which, with looser lines, tends to purple while the other, which is tighter, tends towards a cold, blue obscurity. They are expressing different angles of memory.

One of her early series showed encampments in the desert, shacks with an unknown purpose. In much closer shots, small shelters then appeared in her pictures, bedecked with strings of coloured lights, always empty. You might think that the human beings living in them had just left, unless they are on the point of coming home for a melancholy party. Nathanaëlle Herbelin's pictures are huts and hideouts—offering protection from danger or refuges for daydreams. The large red teepee, at once a disconcerting big top and a child's refuge, is like that realist painting which is not realist. Objects collected on a road arranged in a corner of a room describe a melancholy altar, while a real candomblé altar made up of exotic objects conjures up a familiar world. A kitchen, inspired by a scene from Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, and studded with post-its, looks like an evanescent world, on the verge of disappearing: remembering to remember.

Anaël Pigéat

jousses entreprise

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|---|--|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | <i>Eléné, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>162 x 114 cm  | 10 | <i>Garance, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>46 x 38 cm                    | 23 | <i>Nuit dans le Neguev, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>38 x 46 cm  |
| 2 | <i>ENSBA, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>83 x 62 cm  | 11 | <i>Mathieu, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>46 x 38 cm                  | 24 | <i>Maquette, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>33 x 41 cm   |
| 3 | <i>Layla, 2016</i><br>oil on canvas<br>130 x 185 cm  | 12 | <i>Shahar, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>24 x 18 cm                     | 25 | <i>Miquilat (Abrit), Tel Aviv, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>38 x 46 cm   |
| 4 | <i>Base Shahamon, 2013</i><br>oil on canvas<br>54 x 65 cm                                    | 13 | <i>Ofri, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>60 x 50 cm                     | 26 | <i>Miquilat (Abrit) au Neguev, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>48 x 38 cm   |
| 5 | <i>Deneth, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>146 x 114 cm   | 14 | <i>Shahar, 2016</i><br>oil on canvas<br>27 x 21,5 cm                 | 27 | <i>Coin, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>130 x 162 cm   |
| 6 | <i>Café, deuxième version, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>20 x 25 cm                           | 15 | <i>Vincent, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>42 x 34 cm                  | 28 | <i>Portant esquisse, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>32 x 30 cm   |
| 7 | <i>Ecrivain, 2017</i><br>huile sur bois<br>30 x 40 cm  | 16 | <i>Amos, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>33 x 24 cm                       | 29 | <i>Portant, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>92 x 73 cm  |
| 8 | <i>Mains de la collection<br/>Fabrice Roger Lacan, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>162 x 130 cm | 17 | <i>À Jean Luc Vilmouth, 2015</i><br>oil on canvas<br>41 x 33 cm      | 30 | <i>Simon et Christine, 2016</i><br>oil on canvas<br>130 x 162 cm   |
| 9 | <i>Temple, 2016</i><br>oil on canvas<br>185 x 130 cm   | 18 | <i>Parasol, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>38 x 46 cm                  | 31 | <i>Piscine à Lisbonne, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>130 x 195 cm   |
|   |  | 19 | <i>Miquilat (Abrit), Nitsanim, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>40 x 30 cm | 32 | <i>Éléne qui met sa chaussette, 2016</i><br>oil on canvas<br>90 x 64 cm  |
|   |  | 20 | <i>Abrit (Miquilat), Hulon 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>38 x 46 cm     | 33 | <i>Les choses, Perec, 2017</i><br>oil on canvas<br>168 x 198 cm  |
|   |  | 21 | <i>Borne bleue, 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>30 x 30 cm                | 34 | <i>Gabriel Garcia Marquez,<br/>100 ans de solitude, Paris,<br/>éditions du Seuil, 1968, page 49</i><br>2016<br>oil on canvas<br>130 x 185 cm |
|   |  | 22 | <i>Miquilat (Abrit), 2017</i><br>oil on wood<br>38 x 46 cm           |    |  |

