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## Oxeye Daisy Chain

Ceel Mogami de Haas & Eric Giraudet de Boudemange

### **Ceel Mogami de Haas:**

Dear Eric, we decided I would kick off this conversation, and as a start, I have to say I find it somehow amusing to write in English to you, as we've been conversing in French for the last couple of weeks. But languages are never isolated and we both know it very well I believe.

About a month ago, Martin proposed that you and I should do a show in his gallery. Although I was familiar with your work, we had never met in person<sup>1</sup>. I believe Martin's first intuition was our common research on lycanthropy. You wrote an email the same day asking for a meeting. We met a few days later at Café de Jaren. I chose that place because my dentist's cabinet is around the corner and I had an appointment that day. I arrived late for my consultation, and subsequently, I was late for our rendezvous (see! Haven't I told you). When I met you at the café, you had been waiting 30 minutes for me and your cappuccino. My teeth were aching. We had to move fast, and we swiftly decided which works we would show. The next day, my teeth weren't aching any longer, and you wrote that you thought the exhibition would resemble a magic garden. I don't know what magic gardens look like, but I certainly like them.

### **Éric Giraudet de Boudemange:**

Dear Ceel, you would have deserved to suffer a bit more for keeping me waiting in the cold.

The idea of a "magic" or a "mythical garden" arose from looking at your inlays as a sequence that evoked some kind of mysterious land to me, holding the secrets of your intimate legends and tales of metamorphosis. It made me think of some distorted Eden, the opium garden of the Hashashins, or the labyrinth covered in marijuana fumes as described by André Gide in *Thésée*.

### **Ceel:**

Instinctively, we agreed upon a title with horticultural references and chose 'Oxeye Daisy Chain'. It's spring, and you and I know that daisies bloom seasonally.

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<sup>1</sup> That's not entirely true. You don't remember, but a few years ago, I bumped into you in rue des Archives in Paris. I was with a friend we have in common. You were going to your boxing class. We were going to some openings. We were all running late. It was short and insignificant to say the least.

**Éric:**

I was personally seduced by the softness of the daisy linked to the monstrosity of a bovine's eye, some sort of vegetal Minotaur.

**Ceel:**

Besides the obvious pagan implications, it is also the sequential quality of the chain that excited us.

**Éric:**

Indeed, we discovered later on Wikipedia, that the term 'daisy chain' had many entries. It is the flower garland, but also a type of strap used in climbing, an electrical wiring scheme, a type of fishing lure, a knot, a network for connecting computers, a type of group sex or a form of gene editing. Anyhow, it so well fits the theme, a cycle, a circle, a closed circuit like the cosmic rhythm.

**Ceel:**

We asked ourselves: how do we make up an exhibition without isolating the works from each other? How do we create a network? I think that the garden becomes a perfect tool to understand and practise these dynamics.

**Éric:**

The garden implies balance. It is a matter of equilibrium with the past, the present, and the future. We evoked our common family backgrounds, rooted in agriculture, and I was wondering if gardening wouldn't be a way to come back to our origins. Is it a way to isolate nature to control it and reflect on it, in a more domestic size? A tool to make peace with it? My family has grown crops for centuries in a very intensive way, and I feel an ambivalent relationship to maize, wheat and soy plant, as cereals and beans to care for, but also to grow in grotesque sizes and quantities.

**Ceel:**

There is definitely an autobiographical aspect in my work, and I guess in everybody's works as a matter of fact! My parents are cattle farmers, and the proximity to animals and nature definitely shaped and still shapes my way of thinking about and making art. Although the farm itself can be seen as a garden, there is that smaller parcel onto which my parents grow vegetables and fruits for their personal consumption and occasional gifts. It is beautiful, chaotic, glowing, fulfilling, open and when I think about it, I am joyful. Maybe there lies the magic you are referring to.

**Éric:**

That's where our sensitivities diverge slightly. I have a more anguished relationship with the garden, as a place for possible trauma, tumour growth and death.

### Ceel:

Gardens are ambiguous indeed. That's maybe because the garden as a place occupies various spatial categories. The physical space, obviously, but also the dematerialized space of memories and hallucinations. And then there is the representational space of gardens in art and literature. And somewhere in between all these spaces is our show. In the course of our exchange to find a suitable title, you also shared a few images of gardens in paintings. Among other things, there was a Nicolas Poussin painting that I found fascinating.

### Éric:

*Et in Arcadia Ego*, depicts a pastoral scene with idealized shepherds from classical antiquity, gathered around an austere tomb that includes the Latin inscription. "Even in Arcadia, there am I", Giovan Pietro Bellori, understood the 'I' of the phrase to refer to Death, thus making the painting a *memento mori*, reminding the viewer that even in the blissful utopia of Arcadia, death still exists<sup>2</sup>. To me, the garden is also a place of desolation and death, where worms and parasites feast on crawling fleshy vegetables. I can't help to think about Werner Herzog's quote on the jungle, filmed during the making of *Fitzcarraldo*: "Taking a close look at - at what's around us there - there is some sort of harmony. It is the harmony of... overwhelming and collective murder. And we in comparison to the articulate vileness and baseness and obscenity of all this jungle - Uh, we in comparison to that enormous articulation - we only sound and look like badly pronounced and half-finished sentences [...]"<sup>3</sup>

### Ceel:

That's an interesting point of view. Indeed, most gardens are often depicted as peaceful, beautiful, and blissful. But they are also places of transgression and subversion. Because of their privacy, e.g., enclosed by walls or sheltered by trees, gardens encourage encounters that diverge from the social norm. Literary tropes often turn gardens into the gateway to illicit sexual access or the meeting place of witches, for instance. But more widely, I think that most gardens and parks carry a revolutionary potential. Think of the 2013 Taksim Gezi Park protest, for example. Talking about gardens and resistance, we need to mention how gardens are populated with multitudes of bodies - gardeners, partisans, non-humans, celestial, etc. The body occupies, and as such it is very present within your installation.

### Éric:

My own growth and physical multiplication is something that fascinates and scares me. When I became a father, I really had to think of becoming a lichen, spreading

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<sup>2</sup> Bellori, Giovan Pietro. *Le Vite*.

<sup>3</sup> *Burden of Dreams*, 1982 "making-of" documentary film directed by Les Blank, shot during and about the chaotic production of Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*, and filmed on location in the jungles of Peru.

my cells in space through time. In the show, I feature a series of *Moults*, dead skins cast on my body as leftovers of previous mutations in the manner of snakes. In Martin's storage, also lies the cast of my daughter Marguerite's placenta: *Ceremony for M's Double*, another second skin so to say. Her placenta will be planted in my vegetable garden on her second birthday, on the 21st of May. Until now, it's still in the freezer.<sup>4</sup>

**Geel:**

Next to the carrots and the celery!?

**Éric:**

It neighbours a Ben & Jerries cookie ice cream and a bag of frozen oven fries.

**Geel:**

At the gallery, in the works, I show among yours, the body is also often present, but the fragmented body, with a particular focus on the alimentary canal, and within that system, it is the mouth that interests me most. That is why teeth are a recurring symbol throughout the works. The mouth is the first step of the digestive tract, but it also becomes the place where language is formed. This function shift is something that animates me, to say the least. Eating and talking (and kissing, as Hélène Cixous in her book *L'Amour du loup et autres remords* would emphasize) all happen with(in) the mouth. So, in order to align with these concepts around food/digestion/ expression/language, I chose to work on discarded kitchen countertops as a matrix for this ongoing series of inlay panels. Thus, if we follow the cycle of your four moon works (Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue Moon - 2017/2023): carrots and celery grow in the garden, and are then preserved in the freezer (next to the placenta in your case), prepared on the countertop and chewed with our teeth, and ultimately exalted with our tongues.

**Éric:**

To follow up on your thought, I like to think of the body as a garden. In the recent video game and world success series *The Last of Us*, humans are colonized by a fungus which takes over their bodies, turning them into soil. There is an erotic beauty in the slow metamorphosis taking over the character's bodies from inside before growing into a colourful mycelium root system. In such films as *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, Earth is turned into a garden. Alien plant spores have fallen from space and grown into large seed pods, each one capable of producing a visually identical copy of a human like you would grow a tomato.

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<sup>4</sup> In 2010, medical anthropologists Daniel Benyshek and Sharon Young studied the placenta traditions across 179 societies. Among the 109 communities that held placenta rituals, there were 169 different disposal methods, which included burial, incineration, placement in a specific location, or eating the placenta.

**Ceel:**

Besides the representational gardens, what is your favourite physical garden?

**Éric:**

*Okunoin*, Japan's largest graveyard on top of sacred Mount Kōya, on which a forest grows between the tombs. And you, do you have a favourite garden?

**Ceel:**

Cemeteries and gardens have so much in common indeed<sup>5</sup>. Gardens die and return each season, and like cemeteries are somehow halfway between the immediate and the eternal.

It's hard for me to pick a favourite garden. So I'll just hop from one to another. Like a bunny. Or a flea.

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<sup>5</sup> In Michel Foucault's text *Of Other Spaces* (1967), he explains that some spaces are fundamentally 'other'. By that he means they are disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming. He calls these spaces heterotopias and uses the example of gardens and cemeteries as epitomes.