

**Bulle du Monde**

# **The process shows the way**

**By Catherine Lefebvre**

**Le Bicolore**

**Maison du  
Danemark**

# The process shows the way

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## Everything flows

Copenhagen, 9 May 2022

I have an appointment to meet Nour Fog in their studio in Nørre Søgade, in the middle of Copenhagen. We have already spoken, and I am looking forward to visiting them and continuing our discussion about the Nour Fog exhibition in Paris this time next year.

At the start of a conversation with an artist who is about to show their work, I like to use short phrases rather like the aphorisms in which the Greek philosopher Heraclitus expressed his ideas. What are your aims? How do you work? What does your work mean? What will the viewer experience?

Nour Fog welcomes me into their basement studio. I am instantly struck by the serenity and generosity they radiate. Lined up in front of me are prototypes of ceramic sculptures, each more splendid than the last, awaiting their audience. We sit down, and Nour serves coffee in cups they made themselves.

Where shall we begin? It's about water. Water is everywhere. Bubbles form in water. Life begins in water. Newly-formed bubbles are an illustration of life, springing from the stupendous, life-giving element of water after nine months in the amniotic fluid.

"I'm thinking in terms of bubbles," explains Nour Fog. "Clay is 50% water, and a lot of my work is connected with water. I've exhibited in a former sewage works and made a ship's figurehead." The bubble isn't directly connected with Covid - it isn't a Covid bubble or a bubble of Covid artworks - but since the pandemic, Fog's artworks have become more personal. As the artist says, they have more heart.

"Louise Bourgeois is a great source of inspiration for me," continues Nour. Nour identifies with Bourgeois' *oeuvre*, from which their artworks trace a direct line of descent, especially in terms of sculptural practice, themes and reactions. Might this "French connection" provide an opening and help forge links with the French art scene Nour is preparing to launch themselves on in May 2023? The same thought regarding Paris - the connection between Nour Fog and Louise Bourgeois - has occurred to us both.

Nour is interested in the image of Paris - not the glossy idealized image, but something else. The artist has just got back from Paris and is thinking about how to sum up their impressions of the city to their essentials. "The exhibition will feature metallic glazes, dark clay, wire and transparent textiles," declares Nour unhesitatingly, even though "everything flows".

Heraclitus (580-540 BCE) is said to have used the saying “Everything flows” to explain the inner coherence of the world. By this, he meant that the world is constantly changing, like a stream that flows freely through all things, unifying the world and creating order.

Water. Clay.

## Vase and water

Copenhagen, 5 July 2022

We meet again in Nour’s studio in Copenhagen. There is a very strong wind today and it is raining as I park my bicycle in front of the studio windows.

Inside, all is calm and serenity. My gaze lights on a series of pictures. “I’ve taken a ten-year break from painting, but now it’s time for me to start painting again,” says Nour. “I’ve been painting all my life. I enjoy it, and my painting has now become more abstract.”

“I think I’ve found a pictorial language that works with sculpture,” continues Nour. “Fresh nuances emerge - you have to dare to change, challenge yourself and confront repetition.” The pictures, set alongside clay sculptures that are either lying on the floor or suspended in the air, have already entered into conversation with them.

Then my attention is caught by various clay vases waiting to be fired. Their shapes vary, but they all look caved in, as if they had suddenly collapsed and deflated. As a symbol of maternity, the vase is a strong image. These clay vases are collapsed, like a placenta that is no longer of any use. Ceramic jars and vases are maternal as well as functional: their different parts use the vocabulary the body - foot, waist, neck and so on.

The body is the starting-point for Nour’s references and language. Water, the life-giving element, flows from pottery. In Nour Fog’s work, clay is soft, round and warm, both before and after firing.

The clay sculptures are standing or lying on the floor or suspended in the air, as they will be in Paris. “The sculptures on the floor are receptacles. The shapes of the pots refer to the body. Brightly-coloured paintings will add softness and tenderness to the exhibition. Combining paint with fabrics will make the exhibition softer than I initially planned.”

Nour is planning to show around ten pictures in Paris. Might the media of fabric and paint succeed in capturing the city and its meanings?

Materiality takes us back to Greek philosophy and the unity of opposites under a single, universal law. Here too, there is a dialogue: Heraclitus and Louise Bourgeois converse with Nour Fog. The law we seek is undoubtedly to be found somewhere between fabric and clay, pictures and sound.

Seek, and ye shall find.  
Bourgeois and Heraclitus.

## The process shows the way

Copenhagen, 31 August 2022

This time, there will be three of us in the studio. Gitte Delcourt, who selected Nour Fog to be the subject of the exhibition, is in Copenhagen. Gitte works at the Danish Embassy in Paris and we are lucky enough to have been able to set up a meeting.

Nour has been very busy with the Enter Art Fair in Copenhagen and a big artwork that has just been unveiled at the Sydhavn Station exhibition venue.

They have also continued to wrestle with their paintings. “I’m having trouble finding a language that speaks to the sculptures,” says Nour. “The paintings are in a process and I don’t yet know what route it will take.”

Another process that has been occupying Nour for some time is the work on the pottery glazes. They have conducted many trials and have now

perfected the technique. “There’s nothing secret about it. In fact, it’s something I teach.” Nour has been simultaneously experimenting with transparency and attempting to obtain a wider variety of shades with the glazes. The colours of the clay play an important part and contribute to a complex chemical and artistic process.

Gitte and I absorb the space and the artworks, wondering which of them will make up the Paris exhibition.

After each of my encounters with Nour Fog, I produce a piece of writing intended to illustrate the artist’s process as they prepare for a new exhibition.

We agree that it would be interesting for the public to follow the artist through all the stages of their work via clay samples, sketches, writings and prototypes, and that these should be an integral part of the exhibition. There should be a specific process space dedicated to showing how an artwork develops and comes into being.

We discuss titles - what the exhibition title should emphasize. The title has to be personal. It has to come from inside Nour as a physical, bodily, tactile being. The theme of the bubble naturally emerges as a frame of reference that permeates the entire exhibition.

The fabric used in the exhibition will be transparent and organic. It will be reminiscent of corals, space and the depths of the ocean.

The transport crates are ready. They are very beautiful - the crates in which the sculptures will be transported from the studio. The exhibition will also have a sound component, which will use extended vocal technique - sounds rather than language. Might those sounds be in the process of creating a language of their own?

Aristotle saw natural processes not as necessary laws but as organic developments.

In Nour Fog’s work, too, the process is natural and organic. It shows the way and connects.

## The first breath

Copenhagen, 8 December 2022

A biting cold has seized Copenhagen. The lakes are frozen. I walk from Nørreport underground station to Nour’s studio. I am eager to see them again. A lot has happened since last time. From our email conversation, it sounds as if Nour has reworked their ideas, rooting them in a very powerful concept that springs from their own experience.

Their new masterpiece has come into being: an impressive installation made up of a series of clay babies lying on the floor in different positions and variations, set on cushions that raise them up and slightly protect them - a reference to Louise Bourgeois. The artwork evokes the beginning of life, the simultaneous fragility and strength of human beings - an image of the human physiomy that is not always conventionally beautiful.

With great honesty, Fog shows us the newborn baby. Over time, the human being forms and takes its place in life, and its external appearance is refined and develops, but for the moment it is a newborn baby. In this installation, we encounter something that is both familiar and overwhelming. Through clay, with great sensuality and materiality, Nour Fog shows us a kind of primeval matter of existence. The earliest Greek philosophers sought the primal substance from which everything sprang. Through the newborn baby and its image, Fog shows us an equivalent of this primal substance.

This large installation forming a kind of jigsaw puzzle of human bodies that vie for viewers’ attention will take up over half the exhibition space. It can already be justly described as a masterpiece whose scope and significance epitomise the exhibition.

We continue our discussions about the arrangements for the exhibition. It is provisionally planned that the hanging sculptures (which will be suspended by wires) will have a space of their own with specific lighting so that it is

in semi-darkness. A sound artwork by the artist Jirasol Pereira Ayala form a counterpoint to the exhibition as a whole.

Nour has also worked on stands for the sculptures, vases and jars (also made of clay) that will be set on the floor. In the photographs Nour shows me, the stands raise up the artworks and give them a whole new dimension. Their strength is transposed to higher spheres, giving them a new identity. Pottery is elevated and celebrated.

The means by which the process behind the exhibition will be presented is also beginning to have its own language: it will take the form of a video about Nour Fog and an oversized book of photographs and writings about the process. Each piece falls into place in the vast, complex puzzle of an exhibition that presents new artworks.

To tell the truth, when I first met Nour Fog, I had the impression that all these pieces had largely found their place already. The outline of the exhibition was clearly defined from the outset, and it was obvious what it should contain. So as exhibition curator, I let myself be guided by the artist, who showed me the way. I am hardly surprised that we go back to the beginning of life and the first breath. This is where Nour Fog truly finds meaning.

## Conclusion?

Copenhagen, 17 February 2023

That morning, Copenhagen seemed especially grey and freezing. I joined Nour Fog in their studio and we picked up the threads of our discussion. Nour poured us coffee in superb ceramic cups and we took stock, calmly. The exhibition had evolved: as a matter of course, it had reached a maturity that was evident in the artworks and the reflection behind them.

In the same way as Heraclitus' Fragments can be read as poetry if you look at them from a certain angle, you can project yourself into the themes explored by Nour Fog. Heraclitus and Nour Fog...

Nour's residence in the SVFK (Danish Art Workshops) in Copenhagen was productive: the artist was able to try out the exhibition in their light, spacious studio and experiment with a variety of techniques including welding and sewing.

All three of us - Gitte, from the Danish Embassy in Paris, Hanne, from the exhibition space Augustiana Kunstpark & Kunsthall, and myself - met Nour in the SFVK in January and had the pleasure of seeing most of the new artworks Nour planned to show in Paris for the first time. After Paris, all the artworks in the exhibition will go on display at Augustiana, in Augustenborg, Denmark.

From the outset, Nour selected the artworks to be exhibited in Paris with great care and constantly adhered to a tightly-planned mental schedule. In the meantime, they continued to create and are still creating new artworks. The exhibition theme seems to call forth an endless sequence of new works so strong that they risk disturbing the balance of the exhibition's underlying universal message: how fragile human beings are and how utterly vital it is to love, attend to and take care of them.

Truth to tell, we have taken a detour through Greek philosophy to reach an understanding of the core element of the exhibition. Nour Fog set out to explore highly personal life experiences - the birth of a premature baby and the initial phase of life in which the baby gets stronger each day. The artworks displayed conjure up life in all its fragility and strength, interacting with the accompanying sound environment written and composed by Jirasol Pereira Ayala.

As viewers, we will encounter easily recognizable themes presented in a highly novel way and a sound creation that amplifies the responses Fog's artworks trigger in us.

All of a sudden, Nour Fog says that they enjoyed working with a potter's wheel again. Perhaps, for the artist, returning to their potter's wheel and modelling clay to express themselves

and formulate precisely what is important to them in the here and now is like a homecoming.

Heraclitus' "Everything flows" pithily sums up the eternal process of becoming. Not that everything is unstable, but that the world is in perpetual motion, constantly changing, just as a newborn baby is continually changing in the process of becoming a viable, perfectly complete human being.

# Le Bicolore



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