

Chrom

A metamorphosis

Lise Haller Baggesen

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Le Bicolore

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**Color represents
the utopian promise
of things as they
could be.**

Lise Haller Baggesen

Introduction

In 2020, locked down in her studio in Chicago (United States), Lise Haller Baggesen began working with the materials at hand, i.e. vintage clothing and paint tubes. She then acquired prom dresses in second-hand clothes stores, painting designs and patterns on their shimmery satin. Stretched canvases served as palettes, and as surfaces upon which to copy the lyrics of songs which are the soundtrack to her daily life. Words and slogans were inscribed in areas of colour which have been painted upon the dresses' fabrics. The extended isolation in the studio enabled her to carry out photo shoots with her teenage daughter, who wore and performed in the painted dresses, through which new silhouettes and vignettes emerged. Initial attempts gave rise to a series of paintings on fabric and to sculptures composed of painted dresses which are now repurposed in immersive installations. For this, her first solo exhibition in Paris, Lise Haller Baggesen will present her work in the wider context of the history of art (omnipresent in the museums and public and private collections of the European capital of the arts) through the prism of color, combining it with the vibrancy of contemporary creation. This colorful outlook on the world is further enriched by an increasing awareness of environmental issues,

specifically, by paying attention to the multitude of living things and other beings in the world and how they might develop symbiotic relationships. This metamorphosis is expressed principally through the idea of the chrysalis sculptures. The ability of living creatures to transform themselves into complex arrangements, the link between the futures facing humans and non-humans, the living, the dead and the inorganic, the sheer range of sculpted shapes and the artist's wide visual spectrum combine to make the exhibition a showcase that's open to the possibilities of new, shared futures.

The ChromAmour: une métamorphose exhibition has been designed for Le Bicolore in partnership with curator Kathy Alliou.



Photo: © Lise Heller Baggesen

Interview

Kathy Alliou
Curator

Kathy Alliou: “ChromAmour” will be your second solo show in France at Le Bicolore in Paris, following “Apocalypstick” at Confort Moderne in Poitiers in the summer of 2023.

“Apocalypstick” laid the foundation for a possible new world, a landscape inhabited by chrysalis-forms embodying ways of welcoming future worlds; multi-colored debutante dresses in a multiplicity of shapes, perfectly set off by pop slogans inscribed in vibrant paintings.

Can we see your new show “ChromAmour” as a milestone, a first hypothesis, for this new world, towards a new collective and utopian adventure?

Lise Haller Baggesen: Before “Apocalypstick” there was “The Painted Book of The City of Ladies Wear,” at RUSCHWOMAN in Chicago in the winter of 2022, which was the first time this shape-shifting body of work was presented, as curated by Matt Morris. It’s “Debutante Ball,” if you like.

There would be no “first hypothesis” without an acknowledgement of this prequel, and of our shared baggage. You and I have been on this journey together for a while, and the metamorphosis which this work represents also stems from our shared

adventure and vocabulary, in the ongoing conversation between an artist, a curator, and the work itself. You were the first to point out to me that the works resembled chrysalises or cocoons, implicating the missing body as a site for transformation. This was an association which I had not yet thought of myself, but the moment you articulated it, it hit me between the eyes like “Duh!” This is what I was trying to get at all along. Therein lies its transgressive, intergenerational, collective, and utopian potential. The Danish saying “Nød lærer nøgen kvinde at spinde” (need will teach a naked woman to spin yarn) indicates a need-based skillset; the (main) body of work featured in this show was born out of the constraints and isolation resulting from the long COVID lockdown. The title *ChromAmour* NOW indicates that our collective chromophobia is over. We’re sick of being sick, we’re tired of being tired, we’re skin hungry for the human touch, for the brush stroke, for the tactile rather than the digital. We’re ready for the color to return to our cheeks and to our streets.

KA: Do you share this political point of view on love, allowing us to assert that ‘Awakening to love can happen only as we let go our obsession with power and domination’ (bell hooks in “all about love”)?

LHB: Hahah... you and your trick questions! I had to ponder this one so long that I almost never sent this email...

Your quote “Awakening to love can happen only as we let go our obsession with power and domination” at first reminded me of that Sting song “If You Love Somebody Set Them Free” which I always found kind of smarmy and disingenuous. It is so non-committal. (Or, at least, that’s what I thought at the time, when that was a hit and I was coming of age, and insisting on being “loved” and “free” at the same time.)

But what if, instead, we turned the premise around and asserted that “letting go of our obsession with power and domination can only happen as we awaken ourselves to love.” I think now we have something we can work with. It could be very pragmatic, as in Belle and Sebastian’s “Write about Love:”

I know a spell/
That will make you well/
Write about love/
It can be in any tense/
But it must make sense

We're not talking about an authoritarian and instant "letting go" which is just another form of submission, and which we secretly bargain will sort us out and immediately fill us up with pure "Love". Rather it is an intention, which by incremental (and very practical and concrete) (baby-)steps will move us closer to the ineffably infinite idea, the abstraction which is "Love."
(We are talking to a child here, which is as it should be, because it is our inner child that is having trouble with the object permanence of "Love.")
As Fromm argues, "Love is as love does. Love is an act of will - namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love." We choose to love. Love is as love does.
Does that answer your question?

KA: Yes, totally. This voluntary and transformative dimension of love naturally leads me to ask you about color, which is a fundamental element in your work as a painter and sculptor. Could you tell us more about this 'joyful vision of the transformative power of love (bell hook), and color (author's comment)?

LHB: Color, like love (and power) has the amorphous ability to flood your entire field of vision. Close your eyes and turn your head toward the sun: you're back in the oceanic interiority of the womb. Open your eyes and stare into the sky's endless blue abyss, which, when you try to define its exact color, its "blueness" seems to fade and it seems only endless. (The sky is not the limit; the sky is limitlessness.) Let yourself be blinded by the strobe light in a crowd on the dance floor; you don't make the magic happen; you are the magic. These blissful moments are hard to recreate in a fine arts space, including galleries and museums, where we like to be intellectually and critically in control. Control is expressed most effectively in the binary of black and white. In our collective agreement, there is a tacit understanding black and white is the stark representation of the factual, of "things as they are."

In contrast, color represents the utopian promise of “things as they could be.” In the annals of power, color is like cursing in the church — just look at the graphic color scheme of fascism, with its dramatic red, white and black, vs the more forgiving and inclusive rainbow banner. By blending and bleeding color turns into something messier, like scent and sensuality. Our response to color is emotional; it opens (us) up (to) the possibility of the profane, the ridiculous, and the sublime. We seldom cry in museums, but maybe it’s okay to cry or laugh a little more in these spaces, and maybe color can help us get there? I once wrote in a book that “when you mix red, white and blue, it makes lavender.” If that sounds naively and willfully utopian, it is because it probably is.



Photo: © Lisa Heller Fragesen

Lise Haller Baggesen

Lise Haller Baggesen is an internationally recognized interdisciplinary artist. Born in Denmark (Aarhus) in 1969, she now lives in Chicago. Her hybrid practice includes writing, installation art and performance art centred around costume, text and textile.

The author of *Mothersism*, she exhibits widely abroad, most recently with the multimedia exhibition *A Space Where Your Voices Can Live* at the Malmö Kunstmuseum (Sweden) and Roskilde Festival (Denmark) and the solo show *Apocalypstick!* at Confort Moderne (France) in 2023.

Lise Haller Baggesen left her native Denmark in 1992 to study painting at the AKI and the Rijksakademie (Amsterdam) until 1997. She was awarded the Prince Bernhard Culture prize (2000) and the Royal Dutch Prize for Modern Painting (2002.) She completed a Masters in Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, won the SAIC VCS Fellowship Award (2013) and was nominated for the Joan Mitchell Foundation's Emerging Artist grant in 2015. Her work is acquired by various public and private collections, including the FRAC.



Photo: © Lise Haller Baggesen



Photo: © Lise Heller Baggesen

Kathy Alliou

Curator

Kathy Alliou has been heading the museum part of les Beaux-Arts de Paris since 2013. With her team, she coordinates and contributes to the exhibition program and to the promotion of the collections. The impressive collections inherited from the Royal Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture which continue to be enriched to this day, are intended to nourish the training of future artists, to create dialectics with other artworks and to introduce a historical perspective with nowadays issues.

It is thanks to the artists that she seeks to think, to write and to invent dialogues with contemporary artworks as well as historical ones. She deploys a range of artistic projects from curating exhibitions, research residences, and including all projects based on spoken words, on the human body's performative potential, the transmission and circulation of thought: symposium, seminars, talks and programs of performances. She is a regularly published author.

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