



Why it's worth looking at these 7 canvases by Marc Padeau in Milan

He is a painter from Cameroon, he has never moved from Melong but reminiscent of Manet and Gauguin: he will make you want to live in one of his paintings.

Irene Caravita - March 10, 2023

Marc Padeau, a Cameroonian painter on display in Milan through April 6.

The installation of the new works by the painter Marc Padeau (1990), presented for the first time in Italy thanks to Peres Projects, recreates, in the heart of Milan, a corner of Cameroon, where Padeu was born, lives and works. He has never moved from the city of Melong, not even to study, although his paintings reveal a deep knowledge of European art from the very first glance, from the sacred masterpieces of Renaissance painters to modern masters such as Édouard Manet and Paul Gauguin.

«He had a classical artistic training in Melong, and before being able to devote himself full time to his painting practice, he was working as a restorer in churches. Already fascinated by sacred paintings, many of these themes and characters are often found in his works» says Agnese Cutuli of Peres, also underlining the solemnity of the figures that animate his paintings, «just like characters from religious stories, or from other times, translated into a hyper-realistic contemporary context, accentuated by the details of the very current clothes and accessories, and enlivened by the bright colors».

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Padeu has a very slow working method, which leads him to finish a few canvases each year, regularly contested by private collectors and museums. His most recent institutional recognition is in fact the acquisition of one of his works by the Art Gallery of Ontario in Canada. Dans la plantation is the title of this new series of seven works, all dated 2023, with which Marc Padeu continues the pictorial exploration of the agricultural regions of Cameroon that he had begun with a banana plantation in Njombé-Penja. Despite having decided to give faces, shapes and colors to his compatriots and to the Cameroonian agricultural culture, both subjects rarely at the forefront of works that are found in exhibitions in the western world. Nevertheless Padeu does not portray scenes of work, but of relaxation, recreation, resting, flirting.



The primary subject of Dans la plantation is a *déjeuneur sur l'herbe* in a cocoa plantation near Yaoundé, told from different points of view, through a visual process intimately linked to photography. In fact, it is precisely the photographs, of the *tableaux vivants* in which Padeu poses his characters, that act as the design basis and model for the creation of the paintings. The characters recognize each other between one job and another, their stories intertwine. Although the formal values of these large canvases are striking at first glance, the narrative thread that binds the whole series is perhaps preponderant. In fact, we read in the presentation of the exhibition that Padeu is passionate about history, he is a storyteller, and what is defined as a series, made up of distinct works, appears more and more like a real sequence.

As soon as you look at Padeu's canvases, you are seduced by his palette of saturated colors that create decisive and well-balanced contrasts: yellows and oranges stand out, against all the nuances of lilac, which turn blue through purple. Then, upon slower observation, the balances that hold up his painting, mellow but not excessively material, convince the hyperrealism that dissolves in the synthesis that characterizes some fields of flat color, in turn counter-balanced by the skilful plasticity that models the drapery of fabrics.

Three out of seven canvases are dedicated to a woman in yellow, a contemporary triptych of what might seem like snapshots taken for a social media profile. She wears all the most recurring colors: from the explosive yellow of the hat and of the slightly *frou frou* dress, with the low neck edged with a *rouche*, to the blue that suddenly makes the nails and button earrings protagonists, telling us about the cure with which this girl has prepared. Up to the very original eyeglasses, with orange ribs and lilac-rimmed lenses. She is portrayed in three moments of the day, the lights tell us, and in different poses, united only by the quirk of the hand that touches the brim of the hat. Although richly decorated and dressed up, it is her smile that remains the protagonist, and looking at it, one can only think of wanting to be friends with her.