



LATCHAM ART CENTRE PRESENTS

NIGHT VISIONS

MATHIEU LARONE

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19 – SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 2024

Front cover:

Mathieu Larone, *Redwood* (detail), 2022, Pencil crayon on cardstock. Courtesy of the artist.



MATHIEU LARONE

In *Night Visions*, Montreal-based artist Mathieu Larone presents drawings that transport viewers to familiar spaces made strange. Set alongside collaboratively-made music videos, Larone's narratives and recurring motifs invite us to take in mysterious stories, while blurring the line between illustrative work and fine art.

IMAGES AT TWILIGHT

At twilight, as the sun descends below the horizon, familiar spaces are bathed in surreal light. The world moves into night with hues of orange, pink, and purple colouring the environment. This display is short-lived but offers a unique perspective on the world, embodying the transitional, the border between the known and the unknown, and the beauty that lies in the impermanence of things. On especially clear evenings, the diminishing light creates shadows and contrasts that heighten the sense of the unknown, fostering an eerie and mysterious atmosphere. During these in-between moments, the ordinary can feel extraordinary.

In *Night Visions*, Montreal-based artist Mathieu Larone presents pencil crayon drawings, animations, and collaboratively made music videos which embrace these ideas. Visually, his drawings recall cartoon backgrounds, like those from classic Looney Tunes scenes, but include colours and symbols that invite viewers to question their familiar spaces made strange. Conceptually, his works embrace the idea of transition, too. They glide back and forth between illustrations made for commercial purposes and stand-alone artworks. As one of the first presentations of Larone's work in a public gallery, this exhibition reveals years of accumulated work, while blurring the line between fine art and illustration.



Larone works as an independent illustrator in Montreal, where he has made a career from clients that have sought out his unique drawing style. A commission from September 2023, *The New Yorker* online saw his illustrations accompany the longlists for the 2023 National Book Awards.¹ Earlier, in June of that year, Larone contributed ominous drawings of thunder clouds for a *New York Times* essay by guest writer Evgeny Morozov, called “The True Threat of Artificial Intelligence.”² He has, more or less, artistic freedom in his professional practice, which is a rarity, but in some ways this steady stream of commercially driven illustrations is purely a means to an end: a regimented way to pay rent and make a happy living. In other ways, his artistic freedom positions his work in a transitional state between purely commercial illustrations and fine art objects.

Describing his work, Larone highlights the tactile qualities of his intimate drawings on cardstock: the way they curve from the pressure of compressed pencil crayon, the smell of waxy Prismacolors, and even how the growing stacks of drawings hug each other as the papers curve upward at the corners. “At the end of the day,” the artist states, “what I really love is the way they contain hours of my life. And there’s a memory associated with all of them, too... I can remember when I was doing almost every single one of them, and how I felt when I finished them. Some of them have an aura that I really enjoy. Some of them I don’t really like. But just the fact that I put so much effort into them, and how visible it is that they were worked on, I enjoy them in that way.”

Many of these drawings were originally commissioned for specific projects, but those commissioning the work are often a degree of separation removed from the physical drawings. The images are emailed out for digital use or reprinted in different formats

without being seen in person, and so the multisensorial nature of the work—the thing that helps them live as both commercial art and fine art—is often just for Larone. However, inside the Gallery they take centre stage as artworks in their own right.

For *Night Visions*, the Gallery's lights are dimmed to evoke all the feelings of twilight. Wall-mounted, cloud-shaped clusters of pencil crayon illustrations are illuminated. Browsing through each cluster reveals recurring colour palettes, and often a repeating set of objects: tents, witches' hats, bells, and plumes of smoke, all of which contribute to narratives that aren't entirely clear. One drawing shows a sage and black striped tent, erected in between telephone poles – an unlikely spot for circus fun. Another shows a grey cauldron emitting dense black smoke, which fills the top of the page and causes a lightning strike in the distance. Central to each cluster of illustrations are tablets playing looping animations, which draw on the themes found on their paper counterparts. Something eerie, unknowable, and sometimes magical is taking place in each, and the idea of magic resonates with Larone. He describes it as a fantasy masquerading as realness, one that people can only go along with by suspending disbelief. In Larone's drawings and in magic, the artist says that "there's the idea that you're invited to question what's happening in front of you, but it's really to your benefit to never figure it out, because if you don't it will stay amazing. You can apply that to so many spheres of life... and so, I go to this idea of 'you just can't know everything, and... you have to be okay with that.'"

As illustrations for commissioned work, these correspond to specific narratives. Earlier this year, Larone created a suite of works for Théâtre de Quat'Sous in Montreal, where his drawings are used to set the scene for very specific stories. For the play *Parents*



Image: Matheiu Larone, *Everyone is invited*, 2023, Pencil crayon on paper, 9" x 7".

et amis sont invités à y assister (Parents and friends are invited to attend), the accompanying drawing shows a leafless forest where a female figure has been carved from the trunk of a tree. Together with the theatre production, it helps tell the story of a father who dies, leaving a widow so fiercely in mourning that she is said to be "sleeved, that is to say without arms and in a wooden dress"³. In these situations, viewers are directed to understand a very specific story, and the same is true of Larone's work commissioned for essays and articles.

At Latcham, however, his work is chained only to references found within the Gallery; viewers are asked to create their own narratives

based on the dissonant symbols and places found in each work. The pieces present a story mid-way, with information intentionally left out for viewers to contend with. Larone categorizes this quality of his work as related to liminal space. Liminal spaces are spaces of transition, charged with tense energy by events that just happened or are about to happen. Spaces that have an eerie or uneasy quality, an element of nostalgia, and a sense of wonder to them.⁴ As Larone describes, “It’s incredible what that evokes in people without any other information. You just apply yourself to [make sense of the scene]. You’re the character in the background.”

Looming large in the centre of the gallery is a viewing room, mimicking some of the artist’s drawn tent forms. Inside, three music videos play on a floating screen with animated visuals by Larone and creative partner Henry McClellan, who collaborate under the group name Radish House Pictures. By entering the viewing room, viewers are invited to immerse themselves in the idea of transition and twilight to take in the work. His work offers unique narrative ambiguity, inviting viewers to immerse themselves in the evocative worlds he presents. In this, his recurring motifs allow his work to exist for commercial use, where specificity reigns, and in the realm of fine art, where interpretation and personal connection thrive.⁵

T.D.



Image: Matheiu Larone, *Stone world*, 2022, Pencil crayon on paper, 12" x 3.5"

Footnotes

1. Unknown. "The 2023 National Book Awards Longlist: Poetry." *The New Yorker*, *The New Yorker*, 14 Sept. 2023, www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-2023-national-book-awards-longlist-poetry. With banner illustrations by Mathieu Larone

2. Morozov, Evgeny. "The True Threat of Artificial Intelligence." *The New York Times*, *The New York Times*, 30 June 2023, www.nytimes.com/2023/06/30/opinion/artificial-intelligence-danger.html. Accompanying illustrations by Mathieu Larone, viewable here. These illustrations for *The New York Times* are in addition to two earlier pieces, entitled "The Benefits of Letting Students Mess Up" by Marit Bjornlund, Emmy Maluf, and Francesca Paris (Dec, 2017), and "A.I. Can't Write My Cat Story Because It Hasn't Felt What I Feel" by David Means (Mar, 2023).

3. Bouchard, Hervé. "Parents et Amis Sont Invités à y Assister." *Théâtre de Quat'Sous*, quatsous.com/programmation/saison-23-24/parents-et-amis-sont-invites-a-y-assister. Accessed 27 Nov. 2023. *Parents et amis sont invités à y assister* is a creation by the Théâtre de Quat'Sous and Carte blanche. Accompanying illustration by Mathieu Larone.

4. Lazin-Ryder, Matthew. "'liminal Space' Photography Captures the Eeriness and Isolation of Pandemic Life | CBC Radio." *CBCnews*, *CBC/Radio Canada*, 21 Aug. 2023, www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/liminal-space-popularity-1.6365390.

5. All quotes from the artist are taken from an interview with the author, November 16, 2023.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Mathieu Larone (b.1995) is an artist living and working in Montreal. His work is known for its simple juxtaposition of conflicting ideas and symbols, set upon bare and austere backdrops. He works primarily in the field of illustration and experimental animation. Larone obtained his bachelor's degree at OCADu in Toronto, Ontario in 2020. After moving back to Montreal during the pandemic, he began working on a wide variety of projects, ranging from music videos, editorial illustration commissions, book illustration, institutional illustrations, as well as more personal work. Over the last three years, his focus has shifted to projects that allow him to not only explore his own sensibilities but also collaborate with other passionate artists.

Latcham Art Centre and Mathieu Larone would like to extend special thanks to the following people: Henry McClellan of Radish House Pictures; Drew MacFarlane of LOKKI for *What You Do To Me*; Jonathan Robert of Jonathan Personne for *à présent*, with musical contributions by Samuel Gougoux, Julian Perrault, Mathieu Cloutier and Emmanuel Ethier, and music video titles by Rita Mota; and Léo LeBlanc, Charles-Antoine Olivier (aka CAO) and Xavier Touikan of *blesse* for *creusercreuser*, with vocals contributed by Sophia Bel.

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ART CENTRE

Latcham Art Centre inspires the community to engage with visual art through exhibitions of contemporary art and education programs including classes, workshops, artist talks and tours. It is funded by donations, sponsorships, membership and fundraising events as well as annual grants from the municipality of Whitchurch-Stouffville.

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