

# TIME WITHOUT FUTURE

Cover

**Z.T., 2022-05** (detail)

Digital print; 90 x 60 cm

**Collaboration with Ronald Stoops, Mati Drome**

Cover inside spread

Photo shoot **Z.T., 2022-05**

Ronald Stoops shooting

Photo: Mati Drome

Left

Photo shoot **Z.T., 2022-05**

Set-up at Ronald Stoops studio

Photo: Mati Drome

**PERSOENNAGE  
PENSANT LA  
PLUS GRANDE  
ILLUSION**

NARCISSE  
TORDOIR

**TIME**

**WITHOUT**

**FUTURE**

In 1999 Roger Raveel realised his dream of sharing a selection of his best artworks with the public, who would not only come to visit a museum in his name, but also the village where he was born and had lived his whole life. Since then, the Roger Raveel Museum has remained faithful to its original mission: establishing exhibitions that showcase the Machelen master's work, and that offer a platform to other artists, both contemporaries of Raveel and contemporary artists. From the beginning the Roger Raveel Museum has focused on the medium of painting in all its glory, and explored how this age-old pictorial tradition has been reinvented time and again. In addition to diverse group exhibitions, the museum invites an artist once a year to take over its galleries and curate a solo exhibition that engages with the context and history of this place.

The Roger Raveel Museum is proud to present **Time Without Future**, an exhibition with Narcisse Tordoir. Tordoir is a protagonist of the Belgian contemporary art world. He has been toiling away on a singular oeuvre at the margins of the flourishing art scene in Belgium, averse to trends and movements. He has shown work at prestigious institutions and locations such as Art & Project in Amsterdam, the ICA in London, the Venice Art Biennale, the Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar) in Brussels, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, De Appel in Amsterdam, and M HKA in Antwerp. His work can be found in the collections of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Mu.ZEE in Ostend, S.M.A.K. in Ghent, FRAC des Pays de la Loire in Carquefou, and the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, among others.

An insatiable lust for pictorial and formal experimentation informs the practice and exceptionally diverse oeuvre of this artist. Tordoir mixes different styles and media in a flamboyant homage to painting, an exploration of composition, colour, materials, and sculptural manipulations. He challenges the viewer to zoom in on the image and question its status. For the artist, that image, and by extension all visual art, is a place of wonder and mystery, a generator of meaning. His complex body of work is filled with semantic associations—graphic layouts, bold colours, text fragments—and references to art history. The artist relates to the temporary and spatial context in which he is rooted, and responds to the increasingly troubled relationship between the eye and the image—these days generally mediated by a screen—with aesthetic somersaults. One of his basic concerns is the notion of authorship. Through various forms of co-production, collaboration, appropriation, and references, Tordoir cobbles together a “persona”, a portrait of the artist, and at the same time of mankind searching for answers in a fragmented reality.

The immediate impetus for this exhibition was a presentation of Tordoir's models in 2021 in the VANDENHOVE Centre for Architecture and Art in Ghent, curated by Em. Prof. Dr Guy Châtel. In the summer of 2020 Tordoir had also shown a selection of his works from the late 1980s and early 1990s in our museum as part of the 7th Biennale of

Painting. Since then his work has kept echoing in my mind, and I have been imbued with a smouldering curiosity and need for further investigation. Within mere weeks, perhaps even days, of my invitation to create an exhibition, the train had left the station: a full-fledged scale model of our museum already graced Tordoir's studio, and a proposal had been formulated, including the selection of works. That selection, which has only changed slightly, spans almost five decades and brings together monumental installations with early paintings and complex painterly “wall sculptures” with digital creations. **Time Without Future** is no straightforward retrospective; instead it offers a meaningful overview of important moments in Tordoir's boisterous oeuvre. The exhibition is a reflection on the elasticity and relativity of time: a time to look and to reflect; the temporality of what has been; the reality that crystallises in images and objects; and the view of what is yet to come.

This publication is—just like the exhibition—the fruit of a perceptive and intellectually rigorous artist who leaves nothing to chance. The publication has been formalised and published by Luc Derycke at MER., imprint of Borgerhoff & Lamberigts, in co-production with the Roger Raveel Museum, following a design by the artist himself, who was responsible for the meticulous selection and placement of the images. The book represents the ideal exhibition in book form, including the works that cannot be seen in Machelen for practical or financial reasons. In his essay “Something on Something” Fabian Schöneich delves into the roots of Tordoir's complex practice. Based on a series of conversations with the artist, he explores important aspects of the work in depth by looking at pieces included in both the museum's exhibition halls and on the pages of this book. In addition, artist Sigefride Bruna Hautman goes into discussion with Wim Peeters, and takes us behind the scenes into the making of the collaborative work **Hello** from 2002. A short text from Tordoir's archive provides additional information about the complex installation **L'Africeur de Bogolan**.

I would like to express my deep-felt thanks to the collectors and institutions who lent us artworks for their trust and their support in this project, as well as to Em. Prof. Dr Guy Châtel, who found an ingenious way to integrate the models into the show, alongside Adriaan Verwée. My utmost gratitude also goes to our small but outstanding crew at the Roger Raveel Museum, who has helped for everything to move in the right direction, and, of course, to Narcisse Tordoir, an artist who keeps me on my toes—and probably also the visitors of the show and readers of this publication on theirs. In these times of uncertainty, individualism, and crosstalk, the freedom and integrity of art are under threat. I hope, and in fact do believe, that an exhibition like **Time Without Future** can reinvigorate critical thinking and observation.



**PERSONNAGE  
OUBLIANT  
SES  
ILLUSIONS**

**PERSONNAGE  
RENDANT  
SON DERNIER  
SOUPIR**

**PERSONNAGE  
PENSANT LA  
PLUS GRANDE  
ILLUSION**

**PERSONNAGE  
BUVANT  
DU  
LAIT**

**PERSONNAGE  
OBSERVANT  
LE  
PLAFOND**

**PERSONNAGE  
ECOUTANT  
LE  
SILENCE**

**PERSONNAGE  
ETANT  
LE PIEGE  
DU MOI**



Reflecting on artists and their oeuvre often entails focusing on aesthetic choices with the capacity to articulate a position, like the choices behind the specific colours or shapes appearing in an artist's work. These choices end up defining the phases and eras that stand out in an artist's life—such as the early ones, which find them experimenting with form, and the later ones, where experimentations are brought in again to fundamentally question everything the artist had previously achieved. The field of art history tends to either remember those who devoted their entire lives to responding to one question, or those who managed to create something entirely of their own in a limited amount of time. What does this say about artistic freedom that questions itself? Or about its ever-expanding influences in a constantly changing world? How do we overcome these limitations and account for continuous shifts, when thinking and writing about artists, especially when their own work is being brought into question not only by themselves, but also through the artistic contributions of others?

I was not familiar with the oeuvre of Narcisse Tordoir when I was asked to contribute a text to this book. In doing so, I found myself comparing his work to that of others I had already engaged with. Although there were overlaps here and there, I still couldn't grasp the specificity of Tordoir's practice. This made me curious to see more. I saw painting, sculpture, installations, photography, collages, works in black and white and others composed through a wild array of colours, conceptual and minimalist works and ones adopting a documentarian approach. What inspired me most, besides the oeuvre's expansiveness, is the approach taken by Tordoir, which consists of repeatedly collaborating with other people as a means of extending and bringing his own work into question. Among them, not only painters and sculptors (living and dead), but also photographers, fashion designers and architects. But I'm still coming to that. The exhibition at the Roger Raveel Museum brings together some of this work from forty five years of artistic pursuits. It's a generous excerpt from a lifetime, divided among different, contiguous spaces.

In all the years that Tordoir has been active as an artist, there have been periods of withdrawal—periods when retiring into the studio was privileged. In his book, **Tell Them I Said No** (Sternberg Press, 2016), Martin Herbert studies artists who have withdrawn from the art world or taken an antagonistic stance towards its mechanisms. He writes: 'A big part of the artist's role now, in a massively professionalised art world, is showing up to self-market, being present.' He continues: 'In such a context of hectic short-termism and multiple types of over-sharing, some kind of voluntary retreat, some respect for the Joycean triumvirate of silence, exile, and cunning, might constitute a vanguard, if a difficult and apparently suicidal one to countenance today since it seemingly requires earning the right to leave.' This "right to leave" is often associated with success, although it is not entirely clear what qualifies as "success". In Tordoir's case, retiring to the studio never meant stopping working, only that the

work itself, and his relationship to exhibition and circulation, shifted. Exhibitions are thought of and presented architecturally and in response to the conception and realisation of artworks. Works of art are also often produced for an upcoming exhibition, and are thus often under pressure or made to specific requirements. Tordoir decided to resist these pressures and demands. Instead, he developed a practice based on scale models, allowing him to be free and independent on the market. They are placeholders, but also prototypes that explore specific motifs and forms. Above all, they serve as preliminary ideas for later works. It is often not just a work itself that creates a specific "aura" in an exhibition. It is the exhibition itself, the play between the works, the balance and imbalance, which allows a work, all works, to create a special narrative. Tordoir takes the liberty to develop these exhibitions and the corresponding works for himself, expanding his practice without any pressure from "outside". The time spent in the studio creating maquettes culminated in exhibitions at the M HKA in Antwerp (2019) and VANDENHOVE – Centrum voor Architectuur en Kunst in Ghent (2021). These exhibitions, and the artist's decision to show other "real works" became the theoretical starting point for the exhibition at the Roger Raveel Museum.

The cover of this book features **Z.T., 2022-05**, a photograph of Tordoir that resulted from a collaboration with photographer Ronald Stoops, with makeup by DJ and artist Mati Drome. The close-up is of the artist's head, slightly lowered, eyes looking down and out. The facial expressions are restrained, almost sad. The entire head is covered with white makeup. The lips are blackened, there are two black dots on the cheeks, with a little rouge underneath. The eyebrows are also black, drawn upwards in a sweeping arc, almost to the middle of the head. Mati Drome frequently organises events at nightclubs in Antwerp and all over the world. He is renowned for the way he incorporates makeup into these events. Stoops approached Tordoir and suggested doing a shoot like this. It is one of his latest works and reveals what talking about and collaborating with Tordoir is all about. It involves interest, curiosity and, often, long friendships. Thus talking to each other, thinking, exchanging ideas leads to collaborations. There is no need to explicitly question the work. Instead, Tordoir, as the author, does not feel the need to be the sole author. Rather, he creates a kind of platform that allows others to participate. Here I think of the function of the author according to Michel Foucault, or the concept of the death of the author envisioned by Roland Barthes. Tordoir disassembles himself as an author and includes the reader, the viewer, and even other authors in the discussion.

Everything Tordoir does is based on the premise that painting is "something on something". In the classical sense, this is a rather straightforward assertion: painting is putting pigment on canvas. Likewise, collages are material on a support, installations are material on a construction, and makeup is a cosmetic added to a face. In other words: **Something on Something**. In fact, this idea extends to the various

collaborations orchestrated by Tordoir, in which he becomes the support or medium, and his collaborators the pigment or image application.

**Z.T., 2021-06** consists of a wall painting with a work on canvas placed on top of it. The work is vastly different from the one described above. Nevertheless, it is “something on something” and thus continues to be a painting. A mural, it shows a large surface that shines in rich, lush green. There are three abstract body figures to recognize; they seem amorphous. Genitals and their playful presentation dominate these figures. Words in Italian can be read, such as “BELLISSIMO” or “FACIA”. A canvas hangs in the centre of the mural, made up of a digital print, acrylic, pastel, cardboard, wood and spray paint. It shows a photograph of a young monkey and the sky, taken in a forest. Paint was sprayed over this photo-printed canvas board. The work was created in collaboration with Italian designer Andrea Cammarosano. From the beginning, the artist wanted to create a kind of allegory that depicts the mutuality of humankind and nature. The families of primates take care of each other. The male cleans the fur of the female, which in turn breastfeeds the young. The three abstract human figures on the wall, on the other hand, consist predominantly of genitals, focusing on nothing else. Tordoir did not believe he had succeeded in making drawings that represented the desired contrast. So he went to Cammarosano, who provided them. The artwork is a conversation that presents the realisation that it sometimes takes another voice to develop a work and make images work together.

**Z.T., 2021-05** is a work consisting of three panels, digital print on Dibond, acrylic and oil stick on beeswax. It is flat in colour application, and dark, though some areas are dominated by red or yellow tones. On the middle panel you can see a considerably enlarged eyeball. In colour and structure, the eyeball suggests a body from which life has departed. This panel is dominated by red shades. On the right panel you can see a foot in a light shade of beige. The background is dark blue with runs in different shades of yellow. On the left panel, there is a less definable shape, in dark blue tones. This work was created in an unofficial collaboration with the early renaissance painter Piero della Francesca (1410/20-1492), who created **Death of Adam** (c. 1425/28), a large-scale fresco in the Cappella Maggiore in San Francesco, Arezzo. Tordoir photographed details from a book and reused them for this work. Is this a collaboration? In our Western context, “collaboration” is mostly about work or a work process that you perform together to create a product. It is not so much about thinking “together” with the realisation that there is no product needed, no goal to be achieved. Still, the question remains: does the incorporation of images made by deceased artists still qualify as a collaboration? Obviously, this collaboration is different from others, mainly because the artist is no longer alive and because it is adapted instead of collaboratively created. Nevertheless, the aspect of shared authorship can be applied here as well.

In **Hello, 2002-01**, a work made of different materials, we see two panels. One side shows the caricature, in black lines on a grey background, of three monkeys sitting in a cage, at a table, drinking tea. In yellow letters we read various things. On the second panel we see a family of four people, similar to zoo visitors, watching the monkeys. Black lines appearing on a grey background seem to hold yellow-coloured conversational fragments attributed to the family, and created and contributed by Tordoir’s wife, artist Sigefride Bruna Hautman. In a short excerpt from an interview that is printed in this book with the illustration of the work, Hautman talked about how she loves to play with words, with meanings. It is Tordoir who negotiates the power and meaning of images. When asked why she collaborates, Hautman said:

The liberty of the individual is an economic conception; we have to make associations, without losing our independence in doing so. Visual culture as it was defined by modernity, its exaltation of the self, is waning. A changing world asks for a new way of seeing, a view on the world that adds something to your old world. To complement asks for access. Who am I, or you, to not grant, ponder or integrate it in your life and perception?

**L’Africeur de Bogolan, 2003-02**, the final work to be discussed here, is an installation that was created in collaboration with the painter Brehme Koné and the photographer Alioune Bâ. The title is a play on words; it uses a portmanteau of the French words for “African” and “worker” (**africain-travailleur**). A **bogolan** is a product that uses an African weaving and dyeing technique originally from Mali. The word itself means something like “mud-painted cloth”. The work is an ‘[...] installation that takes the traditional Malinese [sic] bogolan technique as an alibi to question painting and its dispersion over various domains and subsequent economies (the museum, the marketplace, the studio, the workshop, the collector),’ writes former gallery owner Wim Peeters. And he continues: ‘It exchanges the relatively closed or private nature of previous collaborative projects for the public conditions of the workshop.’ Various workshops that took place at the Centre Soleil d’Afrique in Bamako, Mali, resulted in different bogolan, such as tablecloths, clothing or independent textile artworks. Furthermore, the installation at the Roger Raveel Museum is accompanied by a video documentary by Wim van Dongen, which offers a platform and media support to the estate of photographer Seydou Keïta in the search for original negatives that have disappeared on the Western market. Furthermore, **L’Africeur de Bogolan** is about friendship and dialogue. At the same time, Tordoir uses his own platform, his work, to draw attention to a tradition that is in danger of being lost or pushed into a structure where it should not be. It draws attention to a precarious balance between import and export traffic as a prerequisite for cooperation and exchange.

In the introduction to the exhibition curated by Tordoir and Luc Tuymans in 1999, **Trouble Spot. Painting**, at the Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp, Tordoir wrote that artmaking and the art world are two



different things. Michelle Grabner picked up on this idea for her review in **frieze** magazine, writing that through this separation of art and its cultural apparatus, curators underscore the integrity and veracity of their research, as they are artists and are not interested in being curatorial actors in an institutional setting. Is it the same with art and writing about art? There is a wide variety of professionals and a long history of art criticism and writing about art.

How do we talk about work that is constantly expanding and in the process of questioning itself? There are uncontrollable factors that change the reading of a work and thus the meaning of a work: the collaboration with others, the environment in which it is exhibited, the hanging, the time.

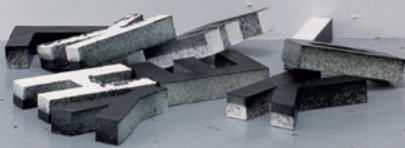
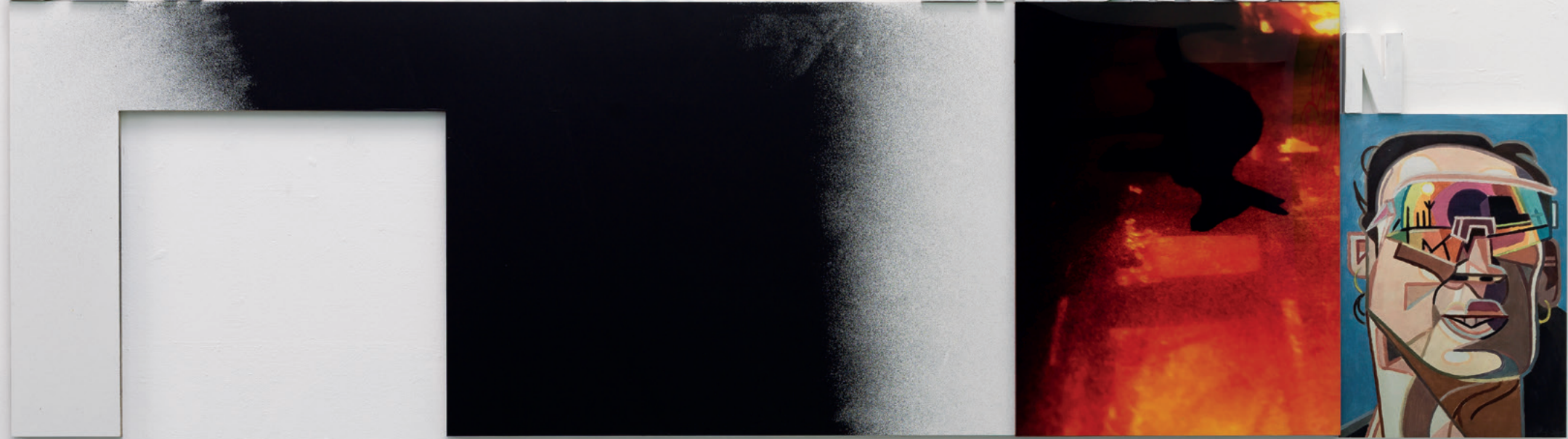
Tom Holert writes in his **Artforum** essay “Joint Ventures: The State of Collaborations” that ‘collaborative and collectivist practices have historically enabled alternative modes of subjectivity; in the best case, they promise to open up divergent routes of being-with-others while subverting the ruling regimes of visibility and representation.’ However, he clearly differentiates between collectives and the decision of working with others as individuals. He writes about a trend—or problem—whereby collaboration threatens to hide differences and disagreements, rather than to confront or expose them. In this sense, he argues for a rethinking of collaboration and calls for it to be stripped of the historical conditions that gave it its form. His conclusion: ‘It demands both an acute awareness of the abstract logic that determines the constant appropriation of social and psychic energies by capital, and a willingness to engage with the concrete micropolitics of material, social practices whose outcomes are often unintentional and can never be predicted.’

In conversation with Tordoir, it becomes clear rather quickly that constantly questioning his work and involving others is not a strategic decision. It’s rather the nature of the work that’s a strategic decision. It is in the conviction of the artist and his conception of the term “questioning” to break out, to think anew, and in this way to expand his horizons. Is it a kind of faith? Perhaps. In any case, it is the form of artistic freedom that should be seen. It is a way of expressing oneself while reacting to oneself in relation to society and the art world, to partnership and family, to one’s age, time and all that is seen. We tend to classify and resist chaos. At the same time, we expect the artist to respond to our context. Tordoir’s work offers the possibility of different readings of art history, as well as different social trends, movements, and aesthetics. Created over the last forty five years, the work offers easier and more difficult approaches. Above all, it demonstrates how differently interwoven and tangled our view of the world itself is. It is a game of change, incomprehension and illumination.



DE W

ER DINGE



**Order. Your reality  
reflects mine  
mirrors time  
changes with mine.**

**Chaos. In my eyes.  
things take time  
my reality is mine  
the reality of things is**

·  
**time**

·  
**Time**

·  
**Time is the passage  
from order to chaos  
they say.**

**Chaos reminds us of order.  
We don't remember  
which one**





