

The curious fragility of beings.

The « *Histoires Naturelles* » series, by Juliette Bates, tells us a story of an anonymous character, who we only discover through fragments of images of a face or delicate hands, but who invites us, and at the same time, avoids us.

This character is a collector, a classifier, an organizer, who tends to understand and defy the inexorable circle of life. The spectral and androgynous figure, wrapped in black velvet, takes us on a calm but impossible quest. Through these searches and failures, the photographer possibly invites us to question our own fragile and unstable human condition.

This journey leads us from Norman chalky cliffs to misty woodlands – two fascinating but disturbing environments. Dangerously beautiful, the white and abrupt shores are facing the sea, with the horizon as the only limit, and its only battle with the wind and elements. Attractive and enveloping, the forest bewitches minds, makes us lose our senses, welcoming and disorientating, embracing but smothering. In front of these familiar but hostile landscapes, our guide seems even lonelier and vulnerable, ridiculously small facing waves and stone, lost in the middle of inhospitable branches and trunks.

We have the feeling he is forced to flee this Nature he does not understand and find shelter among order and classification, precision and organization. Manipulating fauna and flora as objects, puppets or ornaments. Tender but clumsy, he makes mistakes, fails to catch and control the breath of life. He can only recreate little microcosms under glass domes, charming and precious, but vain. Setting these fragments of nature under bell jars is a way of preserving what he is upsetting and weakening. Immobile and silent, the animals collected by the dreamy naturalist stand still and stone-faced, as if indifferent.

There is a little of Vilhelm Hammershøi's silent and oppressing interiors in the pictures of Juliette Bates ; the deceptively common rooms lead us to predict an imminent tragedy. There is also of the Freudian and Romantic “Uncanny”, like a break in the everyday and the familiar, where the most simple objects make us doubt and fall into an irrational fear of the unknown.

In the same style as vanitas, where painting relayed warnings about life and its ephemeral reality, Juliette Bates seems to pass on a message. Contrary to the luxurious still lives of the past, the photographer's compositions are rigorously minimalist. Each element seems thought through and placed with an obsessive graphical precision, all in soft and transparent lighting. Every image is based on a duality between light and shade, as the dark entomologist's silhouette imposes itself with strength in these pale interiors. In this series, oppositions and contradictions are at the heart of the aesthetic, telling us about the delicate balance between life and death, our human condition, swaying from daylight to darkness. Juliette Bates navigates between dream and reality ; all the poetry in her photography awakens a reflection about humans and nature, about our need for domination and control of other beings. Juliette Bates avoids anthropocentrism, staging fauna, flora and humans as equals in her photographs.

The photographer constantly steps aside the drama of existence and of disappearance, thanks to a salutary humor, using voluntarily childish set ups. Bubbles are sometimes invading the images, as if we were in a game.

Play down in order to question ? As a conclusion, and as if she was suggesting a message to the viewer, the photographer invites us not to meditate upon our imminent and inescapable death (*Memento Mori*), but to remember to live (*Memento Vivere*), and perhaps also to let live.

Floriane Herrero