OURDIR OU PRÉDIRE
An exhibition by Alexandre Caretti
Curated by Vincent Enjalbert
At the invitation of Romain Grateau

Now somewhat outdated, the French term *ourdir* encompasses both the act of interlacing threads to form a warp and the act of plotting, in the sense of preparing, in the shadows, something that is yet to come. Alexandre Caretti's works sketch out scenarios that are never immediately revealed, but gradually unfold as the fragments of reality from which they are composed reveal their speculative potential. Indeed, he works with the economy of affects at play in the intimate, real or projected relationships we maintain with the objects that accompany our lives, as well as with the places in which they become anchored in memory.

Often animated by ingenious mechanisms or positioned in liminal zones, his works form part of a spatial choreography that cleverly circumvents architectural constraints. The staging is never gratuitous, but responds to a desire to undo our behavioral habits and redirect our attention toward certain meaningful details, as in the case of the miniature reproduction of a pair of shoes, hung so low that one must kneel in order to appreciate its full, tender delicacy (*Comme un gant*).

Miniaturization is one of the artist's preferred strategies, through which, as Susan Stewart has demonstrated, an object, by virtue of the reduction of its scale, becomes at once tangible, manageable, and frozen in time, thereby reinforcing the sense of familiarity it evokes[1]. This approach is partly contradicted by the models Alexandre creates, which are not limited to being objects for contemplation but instead determine the conditions of their own visual apprehension, as in Appartement privé, which is revealed only when its neon light is switched on. Elsewhere, in *French Exit*, the model is fitted with a motor that causes it to rotate laboriously on itself, preventing the viewer from fully grasping the configuration of the house, which is itself dysfunctional. It thus becomes less a representation of a concrete and controllable space than a device that diffracts reality in order to bring different projections to the surface, provided that we accept that it temporarily makes itself unavailable.

Yet these projections necessarily entail an element of speculation. Before coming to designate the prediction of the possible future values of an asset, "to speculate" means to look closely at what presents itself without yet being able to fully grasp its meaning. This double meaning seems to run through several works, in which value is never entirely stable but evolves according to the dynamics of exchange and dependency that organize our relationships with others. They could be situated along a continuum whose two poles, *currere* and *curare*, define two forms of resonance with the things that populate our everyday lives. On the one hand, *currere*, the Latin verb meaning "to run", whose meaning evolved into "course," and then into the presumed intrinsic monetary value of a commodity, the embodiment of volatility, which has become a *sine qua non condition* of our societies under late capitalism. On the other, *curare*, "to care for", which, in opposition to the former term, here defines an ethic of affective maintenance that resists extraction and the depletion of resources[2]. Embracing this second path, Alexandre dismantles, repairs, and manufactures objects, sometimes obsolete, gathered from second-hand stores or auction websites. Through various gestures of symbolic re-enchantment, he wards off a form of deadly devitalization brought about by their obsolescence or devaluation, transforming them into vehicles for ambivalent emotions.

Here, we glimpse a partial image of the intertwined hands of a dressed-up couple, taken from the cover of a romantic novel, floating between two slats of a Venetian blind (*Strasbourg-Venise*). One might be tempted to read it as the embodiment of a forbidden passion hanging by a thread. Further on, the thread becomes a knot, whose meticulousness betrays the expression of a sincere token of love, provided that our gaze ignores the half-hidden label that compromises this fiction (*Puro Cash*). The knot then gathers into a ball of wool, set into a plastic case and decorated with star-shaped motifs formed by a network of silver-headed pins. Pins of this kind were used to make pincushions, popular in nineteenth-century England, which were decorated with affectionate messages and given to a family to celebrate a marriage or a new birth. By replacing these auspicious formulas with the phrase *You owe me*, Alexandre emphasizes that behind an apparently gratuitous and disinterested act of giving, certain objects can possess an agency of their own and contribute to establishing relationships of dependency, which in turn call for a counter-gift, whether material or symbolic[3]. (*Débits / Crédits*). Through its display, which confers a certain, albeit relative, preciousness upon things that may appear devoid of value, the work brings to light the often implicit obligations and expectations that they can crystallize, leading us to consider debt as an almost ontological experience.

From a ball of wool, we finally move to a dissected leather jacket, whose detached sleeves reveal, both their exteriority — through traces of wear once described by tailors as "memories" to designate the interaction between a body and a material — and their interiority,

revealed by the reservoir of banknotes slipped inside them. If the verb "*user*" (to wear) in French means to use something until its surface is progressively altered, in the economic sphere it also refers to making a debt generate interest that accumulates over time. This polysemy can be seen as echoing Karl Marx's coat, which, as historian Peter Stallybrass has analyzed[4], played a key role in Marx's theoretical thinking through its transactional nature. Faced with recurring economic hardship, Karl Marx was forced on several occasions to sell his coat to a pawnbroker in order to provide for his family, and then to buy it back so that he could enter the reading room of the British Museum — which imposed a dress code on its users — and complete the writing of *Capital*. Haunted by the specter of his dispossession, this coat, both a form of capital and an important social marker in nineteenth-century British society, becomes a surface onto which these economic and social logics are inscribed, bringing together debt, indebtedness, and respectability.

These same logics are extended and condensed on the cover of a manual intended for bankers (*Banking*), covered with carefully reconstructed clovers so that they acquire a fourth leaf, a reminder that the accumulation of capital is less a matter of luck than the result of speculative trickery. Produced during a residency in Dublin, this sculpture bears witness to the symbolic stratification[5] at work behind the clover: from its apotropaic role in Celtic cultures, to its function as a guarantor of personal good fortune, then as a symbol of national identity, and finally, through its repetition on the cover of this book, as the emblem of a supposed economic vitality, fueled by Ireland's advantageous tax regime at the cost of circumventing the rules of the European market. This circulation between belief, economics, and politics reappears in a more intimate form in *Sentiments contrariés*, constructed from the improbable juxtaposition of the stars of the European Union, embodying a hope for transnational cooperation, and the image of a man who appears to be screaming, somewhere between euphoria and despair, beneath his shower. One could see this as an illustration of Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism"[6], which the scholar defines as the pursuit of things that may appear beneficial to us in certain respects, but which often prove to be mere fantasies that obstruct our flourishing and keep us trapped in a cycle of contradiction, dissociation, and guilt. In a context marked by the rise of nationalist and techno-fascist regimes, this montage of images questions, not without irony, the very possibility of continuing to dream of a Europe that is both unifying and desirable.[7]

It is from a myriad of threads and knots that the *ourdisseur* works, endlessly unravelling and patching together the narratives that run through and structure our affective patterns. Alexandre Caretti's entire body of work moves along this fine line. Inscribed within more or less visible transactional dynamics, his works constantly shift from one regime to another, accumulating, through these movements, values, narratives, and affects that attach themselves to them and make them, to borrow Sara Ahmed's term, "sticky"[8]. Under "the effect of histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs"[9], they become, through repetition, metonymy, and sedimentation, repositories of an affective memory that exceeds their own materiality. Perhaps this is where their strength lies: in their capacity to make us experience, through things, forms of attachment, often ambiguous, that never belong entirely to the intimate sphere, but instead compel us, implicate us, and collectively displace us.

1. Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Duke University Press, 1986.
2. Jérôme Denis and David Pontille, *Le soin des choses, Politiques de la maintenance*, La découverte, 2023.
3. Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *La vie sociale des choses – Les marchandises dans une perspective culturelle*, Les Presses du Réel, 2020.
4. Peter Stallybrass, « Marx's Coat », in Patricia Spyer, *Border Fetishisms, Material Objects in Unstable Spaces*, Routledge, 1998.
5. Eline Benjaminsen and Dayna Casey, *Collapsed Mythologies, A Geofinancial Atlas*, Spector Books & Page Not Found, 2025.
6. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, Duke University Press, 2011.
7. Rosi Braidotti, « L'Europe peut-elle nous faire rêver ? », Interview with Antonella Corsani. *Multitudes*, 14(4), 2007, p.97-109.
8. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Routledge, 2004.
9. *Idem*, p.90.