

PRESS RELEASE

Louisa Gagliardi

Hard-pressed

September 5 – October 7, 2025

Opening on Thursday, September 4, 6 – 9 pm

Artist talk with Louisa Gagliardi & Martha Kirszenbaum, Wednesday, October 1, 7 pm

75 rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Paris

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Hard-pressed*, the gallery's fourth solo exhibition with the Swiss artist Louisa Gagliardi. It is her first solo exhibition in France. This is the second collaboration between Galerie Eva Presenhuber and Galerie 75 Faubourg in Paris.

What happened there, and where is Louisa Gagliardi taking us? These are the questions that inevitably arise when looking at such an allusive and mysterious painting, full of details that provide clues to an event in a landscape of grass grains. What we initially thought was a road—due to the presence of a blue Nissan coupe with its tailgate open—could just as easily be a stream with individual blades of grass on its surface. However, its milky color makes us doubt this interpretation. And then there is the palm-like tree, which, the closer we zoom in, turns out to be a brown, transparent shadow, and a group of young figures that appear human at first but turn out to be avatars. Everyone is more there for and with themselves than with the others. At first glance, it seems as if they have made themselves comfortable on the tree. Directly in front of us is the rear view of a pseudo-male figure with his head bowed. At first, we assume that he is climbing the tree, but then we notice that he is moving along the tree's shadow as if on a line. It looks as if he is either hiding behind it or on his way to the group of avatars, one of whom is sitting, while the others are either lying on their stomachs or on their backs. It is unclear whether they are relaxing in the shade of the branches or the tree trunk, or in the grass. On the milky ground, which cannot clearly be defined as a road, a flat tire lies next to a Sprite bottle—presumably not without significance. With this, Gagliardi leaves further clues for us to interpret.

We ask ourselves: What does this figure with its back turned to us want? Has something happened to him? Is he hiding behind the tree? Does he have an intention? Are we on the brink of a catastrophe, or are we already in the middle of one? It seems as if we have stumbled into a surreal film without an ending—one that we “lie to ourselves to make true” (Louis Aragon) in our minds. The boundaries between artificiality and naturalness are as blurred as Salvador Dalí's melting clock. Instead of providing answers to the questions raised by what we see, the painter does everything in her delirious imagination's power to keep us in suspense. Her staging oscillates between a leisurely idyll and the possibility of a car breakdown, an accident, or danger.

With her passion for simulated inconsistencies, Gagliardi masters the subtle play with ambivalence and *trompe-l'œil*. She turns us into voyeurs and detectives, luring us onto ever more trails that lead nowhere. As if the confusion she creates were not enough, Gagliardi titles the picture *Common Enemies*, which could suggest that avatars with hostile plans have gathered here.

Her interest in interstitial spaces is evident, coinciding with her penchant for dreams, particularly the moment just before waking up in the morning when consciousness has not yet been regained. The painter explains that she tries to remain in this productive state. The scene in the painting, which appears real even though it is completely unreal, derives its visual power from its ability to reactivate this special moment of the unconscious. It is therefore not surprising that she sees kindred spirits in Luis Buñuel, David Lynch, de Chirico, and Salvador Dalí.

One painting that leaves us both confused and stunned is titled *Mirage*. Before us is a human-like, artificially created figure in a white shirt, staring straight ahead, unaware that he is being observed, with his hands on the steering wheel of a car, which we perceive through the windshield as he drives by. Twilight penetrates through the side windows as darkness falls. The surreal nature of this scene is reinforced by the fact that the transition between the

interior space of the vehicle and the outside world, through which the avatar is driving, is dissolved by the landscape invading the interior. It appears as if the figure in the car is about to sink into a body of water, the surface of which reflects his face. Here, it is impossible to discern what is real or virtual, or where the transition between the interior space and the outside world lies.

The fact that the driver is unaware of everything that seems to be happening to him suggests that what we see has nothing to do with reality and is instead a mirage. Overall, we experience a de-realization of the world.

What is striking is that this phenomenon is depicted not only here, but also in works such as *Bus Stop*, *Fumoir*, *Desert Moon*, *Out of the Blue*, and *Out of Order*, either through glass, windows, or mirrors. This is not an aesthetic device used by Gagliardi to create tension, but rather a reflection on the radical change in our perception in the age of digital reproducibility, in which direct contact with the outside world through our own eyes is increasingly being replaced by looking at displays, thereby filtering our vision. "Hyperconnected through technology," Gagliardi explains in conversation, "we follow events around the world via cell phones and computers. We communicate with others via social media, feeling protected, and create an artificial personality according to our desires in order to please others. But at the same time, the fear of physical contact in real life is growing. This type of communication gives us a false sense of security and protection, which I find frightening. As a result, we no longer feel genuine humanity and lose the sense of talking to those close to us. We live in an era of voyeurism and in a filter bubble of like-minded people, which is one of the biggest problems of our time and has led to what is happening right now. Everything we post is seen."

By turning humans into avatars and projecting the world onto windows and mirrors for us in her paintings, Gagliardi not only addresses the consequences of the replacement of the analog by the digital. She also deals with the consequences of virtualization and, as previously mentioned, with the phenomenon of interstices. Bus stops, where passengers wait, each on their own and without contact with others, to be transported from one place to another, and airplanes and cars, which take us from here to there, isolating us in the presence of others, are transition zones. The same applies to smoking rooms at airports, where passengers light up their last cigarette before departure. What is remarkable about the work *Bus Stop*, constructed as a folding screen, and the work *Fumoir*, designed as a cubicle, is that Gagliardi allows us to observe those who linger there like voyeurs through transparent walls. The figures, whose contours are blurred, do not notice that we are watching them do whatever they are doing. It is as if Gagliardi is tempting us to look through a keyhole. In essence, she is as knowledgeable about thresholds as Walter Benjamin, who explored Surrealism like no other philosopher. Unlike the painter, however, Benjamin advocated "awakening," while Gagliardi profits from insight gained from the state before awakening.

Heinz-Norbert Jocks

Louisa Gagliardi was born in Sion, CH, in 1989 and lives and works in Zurich, CH. Her work has been exhibited at MASI, Lugano, CH (2025); Cultuurcentrum Strombeek, Grimbergen, Belgium (2024); Edition VFO, Kunsthalle Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland (2023); National Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic (2022); Art Basel Unlimited, Basel, Switzerland (2022); Swiss Art Awards, Basel, Switzerland (2021); Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva, Switzerland (2021); National Gallery Prague, Czech Republic (2021); Wallriss, Fribourg, Switzerland (2019); UN Art Center, Shanghai, China (2019); MOSTYN, Wales, UK (2019); Openforum, Berlin, Germany (2018). Aargauer Kunsthaut, Aarau, CH (2018); Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, St. Gallen, CH (2018); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, DK (2017); and Museum Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, CH (2017).

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