

## **Julien Delagrance** **Artist, art historian & gallerist**

Julien Delagrance (1994, Kortrijk) is a Belgian artist who lives and works in Harelbeke. Born into a family of artists, he obtained a Master of Arts with magna cum laude from the University of Ghent, Belgium. He gained experience in the world of art and culture by working for the BOZAR - Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, the Jan Vercruyse Foundation in Brussels and the University of Ghent library. At the same time, he developed a self-taught artistic practice, experimenting first with oil paint, then with charcoal.

Particularly interested in contemporary figurative painting, which has become a strong trend in recent years, Julien Delagrance began to write extensively on the subject for the online journal *Figura Pictura*. In 2021, he founded CAI (Contemporary Art Issue) - an interdisciplinary platform, publisher and gallery of which he is director.

With this ambitious project, he continues his research on contemporary art and figurative painting through books, conferences and exhibitions. His works as an art critic, gallery owner and painter are intertwined, one influencing and nourishing the others, especially in terms of the themes and subjects addressed in his texts and artworks.

At the beginning of his artistic practice, Julien Delagrance chooses oil colours, which he learns to master on his own until he develops a personal technique. He likes this material because of the possibilities offered by its long drying time, but he finds it difficult to obtain the colours and tones he is looking for. In this way, the discovery of charcoal was a real liberation for him: charcoal is simple, because with a single colour he can obtain a myriad of different tones, whether more intense and deep or lighter and more delicate.

He applies the same creative process to charcoal that he used with oil. The composition is obtained not from the lines, but from the surfaces created with a broad, soft brush that moves the charcoal dust into the paper. The image is constructed by adding thin layers of dust with a brush and removing the material with an eraser to create the highlights. When viewed up close, the paintings show the detail of the different tones and shapes. From a distance, the image is almost photorealistic.

What Julien Delagrance appreciates most about charcoal is the connection that is created between the raw material, charcoal, and the main theme of his work, the primitive nature of the human being.

The artist's purely figurative language adapts to the concepts he wishes to examine in his works: anthropology, metaphysics, existentialism, (post-)postmodernism, spirituality and the syncretism between rites and religions. Julien Delagrance began working on the theme of the human condition and experience with his major project *The Passion*, a series of works inspired by German choreographer Pina Bausch's *The Rite of Spring*. He was deeply moved by the visual and emotional power of the performance, as well as the energy, life and passion of the movements.

Julien Delagrance says: *"The Passion focuses on our experience as human beings. All experiences, including grief, vulnerability, loneliness, hunger, longing, sin, shame and anguish accompanied by strength, adoration, commitment, transcendence, togetherness, oneness, desire and ecstasy. [...] It has a very direct impact on the public as it touches our deepest traces of our human nature, in a day and age where we continue to depart from our nature due to technology and life in ever changing world."*

Another very important theme in the contemporary painter's work is artistic appropriation. His creative process often begins with a research phase of existing images from image banks, films, shows etc. These images are collected, rearranged and transformed through artistic interventions to create a unique work of art. Julien Delagrance thus reflects on the notion of authorship and the role of the artist in a society where all images seem to already exist.

The artist has been presenting his work in solo and group exhibitions in Europe since 2015. His work can be found in private collections in Europe, Australia, USA and the United Arab Emirates. In 2021 he was invited to be a judge for the Contemporary Award.