

Press Release

CONVERSATION

**AN EXHIBITION BY ANTHONY CUDAHY
AT THE MUSÉE DES BEAUX-ARTS DE DOLE
28 APRIL – 10 SEPTEMBER 2023**

Exhibition catalogue

Essays by Marc Donnadieu & Samuel Monier
Interviews with Martin Bethenod, Jenna Gribbon & Alexandre Quoi

**From April 28 through September 10, 2023,
the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dole (France) will stage
Anthony Cudahy's first exhibition in a French institution.**



Anthony Cudahy, *Conversation I*, 2021
Photo A. Mole. Courtesy Semiose, Paris

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Philippe Fouchard-Filippi

Tel : +33 1 53 28 87 53 / +33 6 60 21 11 94 / phff@fouchardfilippi.com

www.fouchardfilippi.com

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On the occasion of this invitation, the New York artist has chosen to engage a dialogue between his own paintings and those of the museum's collections, thus paying tribute to European painting that has so often inspired him. However, rather than taking the most remarkable and acclaimed works from the Dole collections as a starting point—those signed by Wouters, Vouet, Courbet etc. —the artist has selected anonymous or unattributed canvases. Out of humility in the presence of “great painting” and prestigious signatures, with his taste for forgotten or lesser known artists and out of compassion for works that are rarely or never seen, Anthony Cudahy has chosen to exhume smaller, unsigned paintings from the reserves, whose origins, filiations and *raison d'être* are unknown. Some of them are in a fragile state and strewn with strips of protective tape, the stigmata of a recent preventative conservation program.

The artist's choice was made with no particular preference for either period or style, but rather in terms of specific subject matter, related to his own painting. Building bridges across the ages, Cudahy's approach is an affirmation of how the history of art has been written through the brushstrokes of artists, with each new generation of painters responding to those who came before, in an uninterrupted continuum, through their borrowings, adaptations and extensions. For this longstanding project, Anthony Cudahy engages in a painterly conversation from New York with the Jura collections thus providing the means for a fruitful dialog.

“The history of an image is what interests me. The transformation and degradation it is subjected to through reproduction, creates a language in itself with codes and signifiers. This can be the pixelation of an image repeated endlessly on line, or the cast shadow of a photographic flash, placed in a painting. When I appropriate an image and translate it into painting, it is both an iteration and an interpretation. The painting is another chain in this lineage, another layer in the image's history. The translation is my brain working through the image; the painting is a record of thoughts.” [1]

In his paintings, Anthony Cudahy incorporates a wide variety of influences: masterpieces of European art, queer archives, gay iconography and personal and family narratives. He incorporates these images into a chain of transformations, infusing them with affects and his own musings with each new iteration. His repertoire of flowers, the expression of love and intimacy or portraits, explores the registers of the romantic, the tender and the intimate. For his exhibition at the Dole museum, he has assembled around twenty of his recent works. His models are often nude, captured in the throes of affection, exposed in their fragility, frequently in the open air. To this ensemble of paintings, he has added works, chosen in resonance with his own, from the Dole collections: a variety of idealized landscapes, often tiered and rocky, many of them punctuated by temples and aediculae, around which figures are sometimes gathered. In these pastoral scenes, the characters often seem to have been surprised in their activities or observed without their knowledge: certain bathing scenes—including a Baptism of Christ from the 17th century—seem to be simply pretexts for the depiction of nudity. The human body is also the center of attention in a touching allegorical painting *Le Sommeil et l'Amour* [Sleep and Love] from the late 18th century, or in the *Bon*

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Samaritain [Good Samaritan], who is pictured tending the wounds of a lusty and pink-colored, young man. These works echo Anthony Cudahy's taste for chromatic aberrations and contrasts of acidic colors, which in his own paintings form so many poetic imbalances.

Silent, as if suspended in time, his painting is guided by a sense of the dramatic. At the center of his compositions, the human form, captured in an ambiguous context or an interrupted narrative, emerges as the focal point. These narrative effects can also be observed in the paintings borrowed from the Dole collections, notably in the group scenes in *La Construction de la Tour de Babel* [The Building of the Tower of Babel] and the *Intérieur d'une Imprimerie* [The Interior of a Printing House], where numerous characters busy themselves with their various tasks. Occasionally the paintings are overtly dramatic, such as the 18th century landscape in which a figure in hiding listens in on a conversation. The corpus of historical works also includes a number of violent scenes such as *Le Combat de Centaures* [The Battle of the Centaurs] or the terrifying *Scène de Sabbat* [Sabbath Scene], as well as the still lifes depicting hung fish and hares, distant echoes of Rembrandt's *Slaughtered Ox*, one of Anthony Cudahy's references. These slain or sacrificed bodies, find their counterparts in the artist's own works such as *After Bosch* (2022), showing a naked body hung by its feet, or *Snyder Cloud* (2020) with a dog fallen on its back. Finally, in a nod to the *mise en abyme* of Anthony Cudahy's *Self Portrait After Hockney '83* (2021), we find two paintings of women at their easels, both fulfilled yet in despair at the accompanying allegory of Fortune.

The artist's selection is completed by several objects that bear witness to his taste for the ornamental and the decorative arts, in particular the lion motif, which is present on the 16th century, sculpted wooden door of the Dole Parliament as well as in his painting *Rest (Past)* (2021). A 17th century painting framed with an opulent garland of flowers illustrates the artist's penchant for the floral. The paintings chosen from the Dole collections are often quite small, almost the size of a study or sketch. A few of them, such as *Entrée en Forêt* [Entering the Forest] demonstrate clumsiness or awkwardness in terms of technique, yet they remain touching in their simplicity and naivety.

On analyzing the works chosen from the collections of the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dole, their connection with certain artistic movements is clear, but various feelings or sentiments seem also to have governed the choice: analogy, association, tenderness, curiosity... Yet Anthony Cudahy is by no means taking on the role of an art historian and seeking to extract the secrets of these orphaned paintings, shrouded in mystery. The conversation he engages in with them is highly sensitive in nature and will go on to infuse the up-coming paintings he is creating for the exhibition. By bringing these two bodies of work together, the artist is reintegrating the anonymous works into a historical narrative, and in the process, inventing for his painting an imaginary kinship on this side of the Atlantic. On a final note, how can we not draw parallels between these forgotten paintings and intentionally and unintentionally obstructed groups? Relegated to the margins as outcasts, these canvases, through their rehabilitation at the hands of a

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contemporary artist, have been offered the opportunity to be exhibited, not simply as curiosities from the reserves of the museum, but in all their detail and individuality. This makes all the more sense, when we remember Anthony Cudahy's interest in the archives of the gay community of the 1980s and 1990s in New York and his desire to lend greater visibility to neglected / abandoned figures and events.

Born in Florida in 1989, Anthony Cudahy lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Hunter College in 2020. He is active in various collectives and is the author of numerous artist's books as well as co-directing an editorial project named "Slow Youth" and regularly organizes group events. He has enjoyed numerous exhibitions in the USA and UK, notably at the 1969 Gallery (New York), the Deli Gallery (New York) and Farewell Books (Austin, Texas). His works have been included in group shows at the Perrotin Gallery (New York), Hales (New York) and at the Athens Institute for Contemporary Art (Georgia, USA), amongst others. From January through March 2023, he is curating an exhibition of ten American artists entitled *The Minotaur's Daydream* for Semiose (Paris, France).

Over the years, the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dole has established itself as a major reference in painting. Its collections of French, Italian and Nordic paintings, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, were extended at the end of the 20th century by works from the *Figuration Narrative* movement of the 1960s and 70s (Monory, Télémaque, Erro, Fromanger, Aillaud Rancillac, Cueco, etc.) and *Nouveau Réalisme* (César, Arman, Spoerri, etc.). Today, the museum's collection is being developed along two major axes: image and narrative on one hand, and art and society on the other (Ida Tursic & Wilfried Mille, Nina Childress, Morgane Tschiember...). In addition to its permanent exhibitions, bringing together historic and contemporary art, the museum has organized major exhibitions throughout its history, with artists such as Yayoi Kusama, Peter Saul, Yan Pei Ming and Steve Gianakos.

[1] *Cakeboy Magazine*, "Artist Anthony Cudahy Talks Paint & Pixels" by Sean Santiago, May, 2016.

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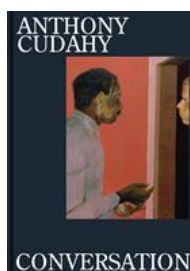
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Catalogue



Anthony Cudahy Conversation, a 120-page bilingual French/English catalogue with essays by Marc Donnadieu, Chief curator at the Musée de l'Élysée, Lausanne (Switzerland) and Samuel Monier, Head of Collections and Temporary Exhibitions at the Musée des beaux-arts, Dole (France) as well as interviews with Martin Bethenod, independent art critic, Jenna Gribbon, artist and Alexandre Quoi, Chief curator - Head of the Scientific Department of the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Saint-Etienne (France), accompanies the exhibition. Publication date: June 2023.



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