

# Baronian

## Press release

**Jean Bedez**  
 Au crépuscule des dieux

33 rue de la Concorde  
 1050 Brussels

**13.10-26.11.2022**

### Opening

Thursday 13.10  
 6 -9pm

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*Text written by Catherine Mayeur*

Since 2010, Jean Bedez has been creating a cyclical sequence of drawings, sculptures and prints that link together into related series, dedicating themselves to forms representing political and religious powers, and the history of knowledge through the ages. While the motifs are drawn from various influences dating back to antiquity – mythology, Christian texts, art and architecture, astronomy, alchemy, science and technology, historical and current events – the works themselves are allegories of the modern world.

The title of the current exhibition hints at the intended theme, *Au crépuscule des dieux* (Twilight of the Gods). This reference to Wagner's opera envisages a return to peace, acting at the very least as an incantation. The exhibition opens with the death of Cacus at the hands of Hercules, in line with his more recent work devoted to the battle of the two giants. This final scene, however, already hints at his treatment of the theme of reconciliation. The image of the sculpted bodies combines Eros with Thanatos, by the ambiguity of their posture, their placement in front of the Villa Kerylos labyrinth in a rework that communicates the idea of finding peace once more. Kerylos actually means kingfisher, a magnificent bird and legendary harbinger of good things, due to Zeus granting the bird a period of calm to brood its eggs in a nest that was built on the sea, because the god took pity on how exposed the nest was to the ebb and flow of the sea and the winds. Its feathers were used as an ingredient in love potions and to protect corpses from horrendous decay. The name was given to the well-known residence built at the end of the 19th century on the Côte d'Azur, not only because of its idyllic location but also because of its inherent symbolism. The villa is a reinvention of a classical Greek dwelling, based on archaeological and artistic research and intellectual speculation, and contains a mosaic that depicts Theseus's battle against the Minotaur in the centre of the labyrinth, which acts as a frame for the image. Jean Bedez's use of this motif at the start sets the scene for this new series and plays a key role in how he articulates the developing theme. The battle scene heralds the arrival of harmony, by using eroticism and playing with subtle associations.

The narrative is then built in the form of a triptych. Two ephebes feature in each drawing. They have laid down their weapons and their posture is now more suggestive of sport and games, then meeting calmly, conversing and even embracing. Their identities are uncertain, as if to highlight their coming together. Almost like twins, sometimes almost androgynous, they seem to be celebrating the power of gentleness and the myth of original unity. The labyrinths that form the backdrop add a layer of enrichment to the reading of the pieces and bring them into the Christian world during the Gothic period. At the time when they were built in cathedrals such as Chartres, Reims and Amiens, they represented a deliberate reference to the Minotaur, creating a link between Christ and Theseus, both defeaters of evil, and reconciling certain pagan rituals with the liturgical forms imposed as part of the period of conversion to Christianity. The labyrinth has therefore become the symbol of a meditative rite of passage leading to forgiveness and self-reconciliation.

It represented life and knowledge, before it started being rejected towards the end of the Middle Ages. Today, it is generating a real buzz in certain philosophical movements and is linked to the idea of personal development. The heritage behind this configuration is exceptionally rich in history and iconography. The contrast between black and white adds to the sense of opposing values in the artist's drawings.

The Sens labyrinth acts as a backdrop to the statue of Andromeda, the first female figure to feature in Jean Bedez's work, who is linked to the theme of love. Perseus's infatuation with her beauty brings freedom and union, allowing the chains to be broken. Hercules is one of their many descendants. There are multiple links between the works. Just as the labyrinth motif appears surreptitiously in a previous drawing, more precisely on the giant's body, the constellation we see in the placement of beauty spots brings the princess's skin to life and creates a link with the whole cycle. Details are revealed bit by bit as you contemplate the work, drawing together a constellation of meanings. In the adjacent piece, the Minotaur is turned towards the young woman and looks bedraggled, ravaged by the centuries, poignantly moved by the seduction scene, and he brings the story back to the maze of narrative potential. Could it really be about our own troubled perspective on this promise of love embodied by Andromeda, on the illusion of restored peace?

The current times impose their structure on the iconography of Jean Bedez, despite the historical references he's chosen to use. The whole question of representation is present in contemporary artistic reflections, fed by the sheer volume and variety of media imagery, but lacking in iconological connections. These images can act as inspiration, whether direct or elliptical, but they also recur in procedural applications. The assembly of the elements is the result of patient digital composition, before being translated into a drawing using graphite pencils, which is the artist's favoured medium. Historically, he operates through an inversion of the creative process. In Western tradition, drawings are used when a work is in its early stages, whatever the final form may take. This classic design technique has become for Jean Bedez a vehicle for meticulously copying the image developed both in his mind and on screen. The academic primacy accorded to the art of line drawing is, quite paradoxically, disrupted. The seemingly classical appearance calls for closer reading. The source material for the images the artist works on and reflects upon can be detected even by manual touch, with the granular feel of film on the one hand, and pixels on the other. This long and meticulous re-transcription process really has no canonical basis and it provides temporal density to the project. It becomes food for thought at the time of its creation and contemplation. Into mythological, historical and cosmic times, iconography was woven together with methodical, figurative actions and, ultimately, the gaze of the viewer, who is carried along a wandering path of meditative and physical associations. The sensitive perception of the works and their subjective and poetic activation are no less important than their political and philosophical reading.

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Jean Bedez (born in 1976 in France), lives and works between Paris and Marseille. Graduated from Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts of Paris in 2001, he also trained in drawing and sculpture with several artists. His work has recently been shown at FRAC Corsica (2018), Abbaye St André, Centre d'Art Contemporain Meymac (2017), at The Drawing Now Paris (2017), at Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2016), at the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris (2016), at Albert Baronian Gallery, Brussels (2015), at the Suzanne Tarasieva Gallery Paris (2014), the Biennale d'Art Contemporain du Havre (2012), at the FRAC Corsica and at the Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Ajaccio (2012), CRAC de Sète (2010).