
WHAT IS #004

My Friend Arthur Rimbaud

Last week, I went with Arthur to a bar in Mar-Mikhael where he shared his latest poem with me; *Venus Anadyomène*. After few drinks and couple of laughs, we went up to my studio in Baabdet to finish his portrait.

Vénus Anadyomène

Arthur Rimbaud

Comme d'un cercueil vert en fer blanc, une tête
De femme à cheveux bruns fortement pommadés
D'une vieille baignoire émerge, lente et bête,
Avec des déficits assez mal ravaudés ;

Puis le col gras et gris, les larges omoplates
Qui saillent ; le dos court qui rentre et qui ressort ;
Puis les rondeurs des reins semblent prendre l'essor ;
La graisse sous la peau paraît en feuilles plates ;

L'échine est un peu rouge, et le tout sent un goût
Horrible étrangement ; on remarque surtout
Des singularités qu'il faut voir à la loupe...

Les reins portent deux mots gravés : Clara Venus ;
– Et tout ce corps remue et tend sa large croupe
Belle hideusement d'un ulcère à l'anus.



**Portrait of Arthur
Rainbow II**

Oil and Tempera on
watercolor paper
55x37cm

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After reading *Vénus Anadyomène* for the first time last week (yes I was a truant), it was easy to fantasize that I am a friend of Arthur Rimbaud. Widely considered to be a man of vivid and caustic spirit, who in 1870 at the age of 16 breaks the revered classic artistic cannons by attacking the standards of beauty, he is for sure someone I want to befriend.

« Good taste leads to impotence. »

Louis Scutenaire

In the case of Venus, he takes an old prostitute and makes her an erotic icon. The Venus here, coming out of the bath, has all her human imperfections: she's overweight, aged, balding, has back problems, and she has some body odor. But these "irregularities" are what makes her unique as a person, and she proves to be just as erotic as the flawless, idealized Venus rising from the sea (Apelle). And yes, Rimbaud's Venus also has an anus, just like every other woman. Furthermore, his impressions are of superior salacious quality; he zooms in on the subject a great deal and lingers in vicious observations. There is a feeling of both discomfort and pleasure. It is porn.

The idealization of beauty and especially women's beauty is still prevalent in the 21st century. There is a universal fascination with obtaining beauty at any cost. For many artists, beauty means perfection, symmetry, absolute precision and tastefulness. But Rimbaud disagrees and I agree with him. Moreover, our radical view is that rather than looking for beauty in its cultural and canonical sense, art should follow an arc from the insult to Beauty to the embrace of Truth.

“I sat beauty on my knees,
And I found her bitter.
And I insulted her.”

Arthur Rimbaud
(preface to *A season in Hell*)



Vénus Gravide

Tempera and pastel on
watercolor paper
65x47cm

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