

# NICODIM

## OUR LADY OF THE FLOWERS

January 10 — March 9, 2019

Bucharest



Ciprian Muresan, *Leap Into the Void, after Three Seconds*, 2004

RAZVAN BOAR / JOHN DUNCAN / AARON GILBERT  
PHILIPP KREMER / CIPRIAN MURESAN / SIMPHIWE NDZUBE /  
KATHERINA OLSCHBAUR / JORGE PERIS / ECATERINA VRANA

*“I wanted to swallow myself by opening my mouth very wide and turning it over my head so that it would take in my whole body, and then the Universe, until all that would remain of me would be a ball of eaten thing which little by little would be annihilated: that is how I see the end of the world.”*

Jean Genet wrote his greatest and best-known tome on scraps of brown paper slipped into his cell by prison guards while incarcerated for lewd acts and vagabondage. Jean, the book’s narrator and main protagonist, is also writing a tale of his own from prison. He begins his long, unbroken address by relating that he scours daily newspapers—“tattered by the time they reach my cell”—for stories about executed murderers. He cuts out “their handsome, vacant-eyed heads,” glues their images “on the back of the cardboard sheet of regulations that hangs on the wall,” and honors “the most purely criminal” among them with frames constructed with “the same beads with which the prisoners next door make funeral wreaths.”

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When evening falls, he crawls under his covers, just as Genet did, and uses his improvised gallery of criminals to bring himself to orgasm. (“At night I love them, and my love endows them with life.”) It’s the stories he generates during this nightly ritual, he announces, that will bring the tale of which he speaks into being: “as you read on, the characters... will fall from the wall onto my pages like dead leaves, to fertilize my tale.” The reader soon meets his main protagonist Divine, a drag queen whose attic apartment overlooks a cemetery, Darling Daintyfoot, her pimp and main love interest, a young murderer named Our Lady of the Flowers, and other hoodlums, degenerates, and bottom-dwellers. Despite the lasciviousness of their actions, however, Genet and his narrator celebrate them with the same reverence typically reserved for Saints.

*“Slowly but surely I want to strip her of every kind of happiness as to make a Saint of her.”*

*Our Lady of the Flowers* is an exhibition of works on paper that elevates the darker impulses of the artist to the status of Sainthood—the most celebrated, yet often miserable of conditions. Our central protagonist is Ciprian Muresan’s *Leap into the Void, after Three Seconds*, 2004, which follows Yves Klein’s iconic, optimistic, and terrifying photo to its expected, though presumably unwanted conclusion. While Klein looks to the sky expecting, hoping, wishing to fly, Muresan’s figure is crumpled and broken on the street, defeated if not dead. Still, though, there is hope! If we cannot fly with the angels, why not worship those who have fallen to the streets, and construct a divine kingdom in the gutter? As Jean Genet crafted his own heaven from solitary confinement, the artists in this show transform the base desires of humanity into relics worthy of altars. Through bits of paper in the confinement of tiny studios, John Duncan navigates his own blood into his most worshipped *Icons*; Ecaterina Vrana uses her high-heeled shoes as deadly weapons to threaten her garden into thriving; Jorge Peris transforms creatures of the deep sea into objects of ethereal sexuality; Aaron Gilbert’s delicate etching becomes a *Waterbed* on which flesh presses onto flesh, moving in harmony with unseen, undercover waves of passion. There is a divinity on the scraps of paper slipped into prison cells—this is the freedom afforded by the affordability of desperation.

Opening Reception: Thursday, January 10, 6–8pm.

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