

Artist : Yoan Sorin
Exhibition title : L'antre de l'épouvantail
Curated by : Stephanie Guglielmetti
Venue : Galerie Territoires Partagés
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Photography :
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Yoan Sorin — L'Antre de l'Épouvantail
Galerie Territoires Partagés, Marseille
September 6 – November 16, 2025

In *L'Antre de l'Épouvantail*, Yoan Sorin approaches painting not as a self-contained medium but as a contested, unstable field. Painting here is less about mastery than about confrontation: a fragile surface where sincerity, vulnerability, and improvisation collide.

The figure of the scarecrow (*Épouvantail*)— suspended between menace and protection — becomes a central metaphor. Echoing the lineage of images designed to disturb rather than console, from the *pittura infamanti* of Renaissance Florence to the radical deconstructions of Supports/Surfaces in the 1970s, Sorin reactivates painting as effigy rather than monument. His canvases are precarious bodies, closer to avatars than to authoritative objects.

The exhibition transforms the gallery into a porous dwelling where painting escapes its frame. Works lean, collapse, and spill into space, recalling theatrical props, fabric environments, or remnants of performance. Domestic gestures — torn bedsheets braided into ropes, pigments mixed with water and applied with sponges or construction brushes — meet signs of figuration that emerge almost accidentally, like faces, masks, or fragments of furniture. Sorin insists on painting as disguise, as a way of inhabiting and reconfiguring space rather than representing it.

At once intimate and collective, the scarecrow functions as both self-portrait and anonymous figure, an effigy haunted by solitude, survival, and invention. Driftwood gathered along the seashore evokes human remains, while braided textiles suggest escape routes, improvisations of freedom. In Sorin's practice, art remains a search for possible exits — a way of resisting isolation and reclaiming presence.

Ultimately, *L'Antre de l'Épouvantail*, affirms Sorin's understanding of art as a practice of risk, doubt, and sincerity. The scarecrow is embraced not as failure but as companion: a reminder that painting is most alive when it unsettles, resists closure, and opens itself to vulnerability.

Interview with Yoan Sorin

Questions by Stéphane Guglielmet

Could you explain how you built the exhibition project?

The central figure I wanted to work with is the scarecrow, connected to the recent exhibitions I've done. What I enjoyed most was building a human figure out of leftover materials from previous shows. I wanted to achieve a kind of self-sufficiency and to find, in a way, an echo between my personal story and that of the place itself. I found it quite satisfying to personify the remnants of past exhibitions and stage them this way.

Then I realized that the scarecrow, whose purpose is to scare away birds, is actually one of the most welcoming forms possible: with its outstretched arms, it's a perfect birdhouse. You often see a scarecrow with a bird, a crow, perched on it. I began to wonder if the scarecrow was in fact a site of creation for farmers, for rural communities, a place where creativity was completely free. That maybe they were really making self-portraits. Self-portraits standing alone in the middle of a field—like a call to isolation, or even a cry for help, considering the high rate of suicide in the farming world. As if those scarecrows scattered through fields were silent calls for help.

You don't see many of them anymore—or at least far fewer than before—but they remain objects inhabited by the person who made them. Every time, they are anonymous works. You never know who made them, but you can guess from the clothing that it was theirs. Some are humorous, others more frightening. They are all very different.

So I ended up asking myself if, when I create these forms that resemble scarecrows, I'm not also making self-portraits. And I think I am, because I always want to bring my intimacy into my exhibitions. My process always involves this movement of wanting to inhabit a place. It's as if I arrive somewhere in order to live there for a time.

That led me to question my position as an artist in the contemporary art world. Don't I also feel this sense of isolation? And in the end, am I not using the exhibition platform to talk about myself and to exist in a certain way? By realizing this, I understood that the figure I place in the exhibition is me. The places where I put these scarecrows are precisely the ones where I haven't performed. Performance has become increasingly rare in my work. This is a way of making my figure present in a space without it actually being me—a kind of avatar that comes to inhabit the place.

And by turning around this question of the scarecrow, I also learned that in debates or discussions one can use the "straw man" as a rhetorical device—to avoid a question, to exaggerate a point. That's exactly what the far right does almost every time to twist a debate in their favor. For example, if we're talking about stopping people from dying in the Mediterranean and about rescuing migrants at sea—which seems completely normal, to go and save lives in danger—the far right might reply: "Ah, so you want to welcome everyone into the country, even terrorists?" The aim is to distort the issue so much that the starting point is forgotten.

With what is happening in the world right now—the genocide in Palestine—it was hard for me to find the lightness I usually have in other exhibitions. I asked myself how to keep a certain distance, how to create a gap from the subject. But at this moment, it all feels so heavy that I didn't see how to do it, or even what to do.

Walking along the seashore, I started collecting driftwood, imagining it as the thousands of bodies lost in the Mediterranean, broken apart into pieces at sea. As if they were human remains, limbs, bones, washed up on the beach. I wanted to show the horror of migration through this driftwood.

But in my practice, I am not comfortable with a direct, frontal gaze. I am never in open confrontation with political engagement. So I gradually moved away from that initial idea. Still, while keeping the strong sign of driftwood, I wanted to reassemble these fragments into bodies, rather than leave them dismembered. Most of the human figures presented in the exhibition are structured from this driftwood.

My first gesture upon arriving at the gallery was to paint directly on the walls, totally freely, imagining an interior space—as if it were an apartment: a bedroom, a living room, an entryway, a kitchen. I wanted to create the inside of these characters within the gallery. The exhibition will be titled *The Scarecrow's Lair*, as if to step into the intimacy of this scarecrow—partly me, partly another—that allows for different personifications when one enters its home.

In the same way I quickly take over a domestic space and never leave a place neutral or empty, here it's a layering of gestures: a wall painting, drawings I make on my phone when I don't have access to a notebook—like digital paintings printed on canvas. These are different painterly gestures on display, and always this relationship to fabric, to braiding, which is a habit in most of my installations.

It's something I do naturally, an occupation in daily life that leads me into a kind of meditation. Very quickly I end up with meters of braids: tearing up sheets and braiding them. A bit like the image of prisoners tying sheets together to escape through a window. Using an escape route. Inventing a way out has always been present in my relationship to art. It's a way of emancipating oneself, of breaking out of daily life, of what society dictates we should do. It's a way to find an exit.

Before studying art, I worked as a factory laborer in the food-processing industry, and art really was like taking a breath of air. As if suddenly the blinders were taken off and I could see the intensity of life, and how it might be lived differently.

There's just a small nod in one of the paintings on wood, which vaguely follows the design of an evacuation plan. It might not even hang on the wall—maybe it will serve to build a figure. In any case, there is always this idea of a plan B, of trying to find alternatives for survival.

Can we talk about some of the paintings? How did you build them? Do they represent characters?

I started by loosely sketching interiors, architectures—things a bit soft, a bit comfortable. I began painting before even knowing what was going to happen. As if, in this blank space, I had gone to Emmaüs to pick up furniture—except here, I painted it directly. Here's a table, there's a couch, there should be something to hang clothes... Then, as often happens in my way of painting and searching for abstraction, there's always a back-and-forth with faces that appear like signs. It's really about pareidolia—spotting an eye here, extending a line, creating a face. I wanted to populate this space with faces, human forms, monstrous shapes. In fact, they're masks, heads, sometimes something else. They came at the end of the painting process.

I'm constantly moving between figuration and abstraction, often staying right in between. Sometimes just underlining elements that weren't planned at all. For my paintings, I use pigments, water, and a binder to fix them. For tools, I use sponges as well as large construction brushes. There's always this notion of gesture, of covering. For me, painting is also about disguising a space, in the same way you would make up a face. That's why the idea of the mask is so important: the mask, like makeup, carries the will to cover and transform into something else.

The wall painting is a one-shot painting, like a sketchbook page. It came together very naturally.

Can you tell me about your sources of inspiration, in relation to art history?

Of course there are figures that follow me in my work, but I don't consciously think of them when I start. I do have a fascination with drapery in classical Dutch painting. The difference is that in their work it feels more romantic. For me, I like working with bedsheets, revealing folds and shadows, like small daily beauties—when morning light hits an unmade bed, wrinkled sheets.

There are also artists I admire a lot, like Jessica Stockholder or Curtis Cuffie. Oscar Murillo, or the Supports/Surfaces group. Blue and red are very present in my work, simply because I have the most pigments in those colors. It's very down-to-earth: I use what's available. I bring a set of pigments and limit myself to those. There's something naïve, childlike in that.

When I started painting on the walls, I realized it was a dream I'd had since childhood: to paint my bedroom wall however I wanted. I had to do it. I've already done exhibitions with wall paintings, but usually to create an atmosphere. It was never this illustrative. I also often use red and blue like the lines of notebook paper, but here it's not really that.*

When I see your paintings, since I love Matisse, I feel strong connections. It's a personal impression.

It's true that in his treatment of interiors and plants there's something that resonates. It would be somewhere between Matisse and Bustin. That has definitely nourished me a lot—the simplification of vegetal forms, the use of signs. I completely agree. Technically, I'm far from that. I went about it in a much rougher way, because for me these paintings are not completely autonomous. They also serve as a support for other paintings layered on top, giving the impression that something may have been missed. Some parts will be covered up. Within these large paintings, there are close-ups, small sections that could stand on their own, that could be taken off the wall. But I also want them to serve as the ground for what is yet to come.

Earlier you mentioned politics. Do you consider your artistic work to be political?

When I ask myself that, I know that my place in art is political in itself. The very fact that I, the son of a factory worker, a former factory worker myself, with part of my family of African descent, am standing on this platform as an artist—that's political. It means I stepped out of what I might have done all my life. If I can allow others to realize that they, too, can do it, I think that's already a political commitment.

As for what I show, there are moments where one might see a political gesture. But I've realized I'm not trying to convince anyone. Stating things in an art space doesn't change minds—most of the people who come are already convinced. Reaffirming it won't shift consciousness. It won't reach those whose minds should be changed. I think political action belongs in the street, in daily life.

What I do like, though, is the idea that spaces of exhibition and creation can be places where we still believe in life, where hope is possible, where we can imagine together, gather, and have a convivial moment of discussion—more than stamping my work with a political message. I like the idea of taking an exhibition as a pretext to spark discussions, debates. Activism is much stronger in concrete action, in everyday life.

And for this exhibition, even if I focused on the image of the scarecrow, I also deliberately moved away from it—to speak about masks, puppets, or any human representation that could be part of a popular imagery of self-portraiture.

Yoan Sorin (b. 1982) is a French visual artist whose practice spans drawing, installation, and performance. His work engages with cultural codes and everyday materials, exploring how art can serve as a space for critical reflection, emancipation, and collective experience. Sorin's projects, presented in museums as well as through workshops and collaborative formats, aim to expand participation in contemporary art and to include voices often absent from traditional art spaces.