

Artist: Jean-Baptiste Maitre
Exhibition title: Lower Your Voice in the Room of
Unlikeness - *Silence dans le Salon de la Dissemblance*
Gallery Martin van Zomeren, Hazenstraat 20, 1016 SP
Amsterdam,
www.martinvanzomeren.nl/
Opening date: Saturday June 14th 2025, 5pm
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EXHIBITION LEAFLET

Lower Your Voice in the Room of Unlikeness

Silence dans le Salon de la Dissemblance

The exhibition *Lower Your Voice in the Room of Unlikeness - Silence dans le Salon de la Dissemblance* by the french artist Jean-Baptiste Maitre (1978) presents a series of 14 portrait paintings alongside a single panoramic photograph. The paintings and the photograph together suggest a cast of characters poised for a play. They carry a sense of social decay that Maitre explores through painterly treatment of the faces and the use of oil paint applied “like makeup”, says the artist.

The title *Lower Your Voice in the Room of Unlikeness* is a reference to Saint Augustine’s idea of “unlikeness to truth,” which inspired Maitre to work on portraiture. It also alludes to Luis Buñuel’s film *El Angel Exterminador* in which a group of dinner guests find themselves trapped in a cursed living room, a scene that is depicted in the photograph on display.

This panoramic photograph brings together the painted portraits under a common sense of tragedy, as if all the figures in the paintings were also present in the living room. As Maitre concludes: ‘I see the viewers of the exhibition as figures among the very assembly they are looking at, completing the whole.’

The Paintings

The paintings in the exhibition are divided into 4 groups: Makeup, The Thinkers, Head in a Vase, and The Archetypes.

The first group, Makeup, ignited the project. Inspired by Saint Augustine's concept of "unlikeness"—the idea that humanity has distanced itself from the image of truth—Maitre explores portraiture across time, from antique busts to contemporary figures. Using visible brushstrokes influenced by “fast painters” such as Velázquez, Frans Hals, and Manet, the paintings reflect the impulse to fabricate artificial images of ourselves, asking what becomes of truth when we constantly make up our reality.

With the group of The Thinkers, portraits of Mao, Sartre, and Robespierre receive the same textured painterly treatment, exploring how facial depiction can be associated with political or intellectual positions.

Head in a Vase, one intermediate painting, places a head inside a floating vase—suspended in midair, as if thrown or attempting escape. It introduces movement and narrative into the series, which is more specifically shown in the next series of portraits, The Archetypes.

A group of five paintings, The Archetypes, presents figures seen from the torso up, each with a distinct posture. While continuing the same facial treatment, these works add costumes, objects, and simple gestures. The figures are either Holding a mask, presenting vases, talking on the phone, posing for a reel, or smoking at a bar. Together they sketch emerging archetypes—figures that allude to social roles. Each visual element contributes to this impression: the painterly brushwork of the faces serve as psychological cues; the costumes indicate a time period or social context; the objects imply function; and the gestures offer subtle behavioral codes. Because these elements are quiet or ambiguous, the roles they suggest remain deliberately open to interpretation.

The Photograph

In addition to the series of paintings, the exhibition includes a large panoramic photograph titled *Cut Through The Living Room of The Exterminating Angel*.

This digitally constructed image recreates a continuous tracking shot from Luis Buñuel's 1962 film *El Ángel Exterminador*. It captures the moment when dinner guests become cursed and trapped inside a living room.

Fascinated by this film, the artist aimed to reconstruct the pivotal sequence in which the curse takes hold—a slow, uninterrupted camera movement through the living room.

To do this, Maitre extracted every frame from the sequence, capturing all 24 images per second of the camera pan shot, and assembled them into a single panoramic composition. This large-scale photographic work shows the camera traveling shot into one expanded view, visually compressing time and space into a single perspective.

Painting process

Maitre begins by painting his subjects in a *grisaille* manner—a technique using shades of gray to evoke sculpture.

Drawing on two decades as a beauty retoucher, the artist photographs the grisaille paintings and digitally works on them in Photoshop. He adds skin tones and painterly textures by sampling actual brushwork from master painters like Velázquez, Manet, Hals, Verspronck, and Sargent.

This digital stage allows him to study how the textures interact with the presence of each face. Only then does he return to the physical canvas, translating these impressions into layered, tactile brushwork of oil paint over the grisaille base.

"For each painting, I paint multiple portraits on top of one another, each covering the last," he explains. "Face after face, I work until the figure meant to emerge becomes obvious."

Bio

Maitre trained in traditional painting and morphology drawing at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris (1998–2004), while also studying digital retouching at Gobelins Paris (2002–2004) and archaeology at the Sorbonne (1999–2002). Alongside a continuing career in commercial image retouching, he pursued fine art through residencies at the Jan van Eyck Academie (2007–2008) and the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam (2009–2010), where he created the acclaimed animation *Shaped Cinema*, now in the Stedelijk Museum collection. Over the past decade, Maitre has developed a hybrid practice combining hand-painted cinema, photo-based painting and ceramic sculpture, with exhibitions at the EYE Filmmuseum, Centre Pompidou, and MAMbo Bologna. His 2014 portrait of Donald Rumsfeld is currently on show at the collection of the Nederlandsche Bank in Amsterdam.

Selected Exhibitions and Collections

Maitre has exhibited at institutions including P/////AKT platform for contemporary art (Amsterdam); Galerie 1M3 (Lausanne); Centre d'Art La Salle de Bains (Lyon); Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts (San Francisco); Bonnefantenmuseum (Maastricht); Centre Pompidou (Paris); Eye Film Museum (Amsterdam); Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (IT); De Nederlandsche Bank (NL); Live in Your HEAD (Geneve).

His work is held in the collections of the Stedelijk museum Amsterdam, the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Museo d'Arte Moderna in Bologna, Sammlung Philara in Düsseldorf, Allen & Overy, Andaz-Hyatt as well as the Nederlandsche Bank and ABN AMRO among others

List of works

The paintings in the exhibition are divided into 4 groups: Makeup, The Thinkers, Head in a Vase, and The Archetypes.

GROUP 1: MAKEUP

1. Travestissement des faits: joue droite (Painting as make-up: right cheek), 2023, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm, 2023



2. Travestissement des faits: joue gauche (Painting as make-up: left cheek), 2023, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm; 2023



In the two paintings *Travestissement des faits: joue droite*; and *joue gauche*, the same bust of an ancient Roman citizen is depicted from opposing profiles. One version features the brushstrokes and texture reminiscent of a Delacroix painting (*joue droite*), while the other incorporates the face of a woman inspired by a Manet portrait (*joue gauche*).

3. Japanese Nô theater mask with the flesh of Eduaert Wallis by Jan Verspronck (Painting as make-up series), 2024, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm



Another work in the series reimagines a traditional Japanese Noh theater mask, applying the painterly qualities of a Frans Hals and Jan Verspronck portrait painting. To further emphasize the connection between identity, theatricality, and the physical act of painting, Maitre added a striking blue eyeliner—bridging the tradition of stage makeup with the materiality of paint itself.

4. Your Holophace (Painting as make-up series); 2024, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm



Your Holophace is a painting based on a sculpture from the façade of the Paris Opera. The original work shows an actor either putting on or taking off the mask of the role being performed. The word *Holophace* combines “hollow” and “hologram”, suggesting something technological placed over the face. Holophace sounds like a device for your face that would allow you to maybe interact virtually as a character in a video game, or as a way to meet people in a safe way, where no physical interaction nor risk or confrontation can happen.

5. Daughter of Rubens as Chinese oil worker (Painting as make-up series),
2024, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm



The painting *Daughter of Rubens as Chinese Oil Worker* began as a playful study of transformation. Starting from Rubens' portrait of his young daughter, the artist merged it with Carpeaux's 19th-century sculpture of China and a contemporary image of an oil rig worker with a stained face.

Maitre emphasized painterly qualities in each source—the oil stains, Rubens' gentle skin tones, and Carpeaux's sculptural form. Layer by layer, he combined these elements to create a face that balances the hardness of adult labor with the softness of childhood.

GROUP 2: THE THINKERS / LES PENSEURS

6. Jean-Paul Sartre et la fausse moustache, 2024, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm



Why would anyone depict Jean-Paul Sartre with a fake moustache? For Maitre, the fake mustache symbolises the freedom of the artist to apply, alter, and interpret the subject, playing with the lines between the "real" historical figure and the artist's intervention.

7. Mao, Daily Cover-up Routine, oil on linen, 60 x 80 cm, 2024



This painting was conceived while reflecting on the Belgian sinologist Simon Leys, whose 1970s critiques of Mao's Cultural Revolution, particularly in *Chinese Shadows*, sparked controversy. Many French intellectuals perceived Mao's regime as a radical social experiment and an alternative to Western capitalism. They met Leys's accurate accounts of repression with hostility, mistakenly equating totalitarian control with a new form of liberation. Around the same time, Andy Warhol created his famous Mao silkscreens (1972–73), turning the Chinese leader into a pop icon. Warhol's glamorized image echoed the idealized view held by some of these Western thinkers. Maitre's painting reinterprets Warhol's aesthetic—preserving its bold color but applying it with textured, naturalistic brushwork. The result resembles a green cosmetic cover-up, hinting at the daily routine of concealment and artifice behind the presentation of power.

8. Masque Mortuaire du Jeune Robespierre (Death Mask of Young Robespierre), oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm, 2024



This painting takes as a starting point a 2013 digital facial reconstruction of Robespierre. It simulated his features based on a death mask that Mme Tussaud would have exhibited in 1802. The image, which showed signs of past illness in the form of pockmarked skin, provoked notable backlash in France. Some considered the result unflattering and ideologically charged. While working on the series, Maitre came across

a clay pipe at the Amsterdam Pipe Museum that caricatured Robespierre's head as a pipe bowl—an object made in the Netherlands that rendered the revolutionary with evident satire. Using it as a model, the artist reimagined the face, emphasizing on the caricatural trait of the head-pipe, and turning it into a theater-like mask.

GROUP 3: HEAD IN A VASE

9. La Tête dans le Vase, ou Cueillir l'Absence par les Anses, oil on linen, 60 x 80 cm, 2024



The phrase “j’ai la tête dans le vase” (I feel my head in a vase) or “cueillir l’absence par les anses” (To grasp absence by its handles), doesn’t actually exist in everyday usage. It mimics the shape of an idiom—almost convincing in its false familiarity. The artist explores the meaning of this made up expression, exploring the longing for anonymity and to vanish into something opaque—as fragile as pottery.

GROUP 4: THE ARCHETYPES

10. A Failure of Concealment, 2024, oil on linen, 40 x 50 cm



For *A Failure of Concealment*, Maitre used a 19th-century bust by Carpeaux as a model, chosen for its expression, which conveys a kind of weary dignity. A torn paper mask is held over the face, raising a frame around that weariness. The surface of the skin was kept as bare as possible—so not to define a particular persona, but to allow the disappointment on the face to remain clearly visible.

11. If You Know You Know, oil on linen, 60 x 80 cm, 2025



If You Know You Know leverages a contemporary internet idiom that points directly to the concept of niche knowledge and shared recognition within specific online communities. The painting's meaning remains intentionally ambiguous; while a visual repetition is evident in its structure—the title's reiteration of "you know you know" is mirrored in

the double vase in the painting—the precise nature of the depicted scene or objects is not immediately decipherable.

This ambiguity, reinforced by the title's insistence on pre-existing understanding, invites active viewer engagement. It highlights how meaning is constructed by personal memory, history, and culture—one of the few freedoms left in a world full of pre-packaged narratives.

12. Zero Duck Feedback, 120 x 100 cm, oil on linen, 2025



Zero Duck Feedback centers on a subtly puffed-up face, featuring a nose slightly too large, suggesting a mask, heavy makeup or a failed cosmetic surgery—and a constant duck face expression. The title reflects key elements: “Zero” for the ring light framing the subject, “Duck” for his deflated lips evoking the familiar “duck face” of selfies, and “Feedback” for the livestream setup with a phone on a tripod.

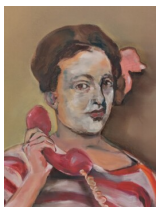
These elements together signal frustration, and hint at a failure of attention from his invisible audience.

13. Freedom Fries Strategist (after Manet's *La Prune*); 90 x 110 cm, oil on linen, 2025



This painting is loosely inspired by Manet's *La Prune* and the antique bust of Pericles. The classical portrait of the Athenian statesman and army general is changed: a youthful face replaces the beard, and the helmet sits awkwardly as decoration. The figure—part soldier, part civilian—appears idle and reflective. On the table lie nitrous oxide cartridges, a recreational drug associated with teenage experimentation, and a glass of liquor. The baseball tee shirt reads “Freedom Fries”—a loaded phrase of patriotic rebranding from the 2003 US Iraq invasion. The painting contrasts heroic imagery with modern disillusionment, tracing how grand narratives dissolve into casual T-shirts, memes, and chemically-induced stupor.

14. Landline with Stripes, oil on linen, 50 x 55 cm, 2024



This painting combines a landline telephone, exaggerated makeup, and a striped shirt. The obsolete phone evokes outdated communication while the makeup and stripes draw attention to questions of painting and representation. The painting plays with the contrast between the character's heavily made-up visage and the phone interlocutor who cannot perceive it on the other side of the line.

ADDENDUM

15. **Cut Through The Living-Room of the Exterminating Angel**, digital print in two frames with artist' mat, 67 x 86, 5 cm; and 60,9 x 80, 4 cm, 2013-2025

