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*An atelier visit in Paris*

*Why Eva Nielsen would deserve the Prix Marcel Duchamp*

On October 23, 2025, the prestigious Prix Marcel Duchamp will be awarded. One of the four nominees this year, Eva Nielsen stands for a novel approach to the erosion of images. Worn, eroded, and turned to dust, photographic fragments find new formations on her large canvases. A geology of painting under the impression of climate change.

“I’m not concerned with figuration or landscape depiction, but with the incision, the rupture,” says Eva Nielsen in a stained work coat, pointing to one of the two large canvases she is currently working on. “I look for what eludes recognition, through which a changed view of the world becomes possible.”

While she prepares coffee, I look around: we are in a beautiful, luminous new artist’s studio, in a new building just behind the new National Library in the entirely redeveloped Tolbiac district in southeast Paris. Paint pots are scattered about in an organized disorder, piles of paper scraps, wood strips, rolls of canvas. On a narrow wall, drafts and cuttings are pinned. Photos of Munch, Bonnard, David Bowie alternate with images that could come from family albums. One paper picture is half devoured, as if she pulled it from the trash—one still sees a forest fragment, above it a black-and-white depiction of a planet on film, roughly taped to the wall. The artist’s universe unfolds between memory-images whose materiality—and whose decay.

The two large canvases before which we now stand are still unfinished; one discerns landscapes, celestial bodies. “I will show them during my upcoming solo exhibition at the Hermès Foundation in Brussels,” she explains. Just one of many exhibitions by this internationally sought-after artist. The 42-year-old is represented by the Swiss gallery Peter Kilchmann.

“Maybe I’ll also show that for the Prix Duchamp, what do you think?” The surprising question reveals one of her qualities: she is open to others’ views. An artist one trusts, one likes to listen to. She speaks quickly, clearly, gets to the point fast, yet is never superficial. At the same time she knows precisely what she is doing and what she wants. And that this highest French art prize will demand much from her.

On one of the large canvases, before which she now stands with legs apart, a kind of bone forms a large circle that almost encloses her. Behind it a landscape spreads out. Quickly painted, coarse brushstrokes, splatters, in the colors rather full, as one might paint a landscape in a children’s book—a contrast to the photographic bone circle. “In the second year of my Bachelor’s at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, that was around 2008, I discovered screen printing for myself,” she explains, “Alfred Stieglitz, Gerhard Richter, Sigmar Polke were important to me at that time.” Screen printing became a key tool for her to articulate painting with the materiality of the image. Back then Rauschenberg, whose work lies at the intersection of object and image, whose engagement with the symbolic load of photographic images, was a point of reference.

At the St. Martin’s College in London she then brought screen printing into the canvas, as here—she gestures to the bone formation. And only now it becomes clearly visible that this part is printed on the

canvas. The photographic image, through enlargement, appears almost abstract. It is combined with the painting such that the elements merge, forming a new space.

The hybrid, the transition from figuration to abstraction has always been present in her work, she says: “Transfer and projection are very important in the working process,” she continues attentively, “while I work, I completely forget representation, what is depicted. Sometimes I paint on the floor, overhead, like Baselitz.” The now 87-year-old German painter of the Young Wild Ones is often exhibited in Paris and continues to influence younger generations—not necessarily in subject matter, but rather in image treatment.

“Perhaps that’s my Nordic share, the many visits to Denmark; in any case, landscape is at the center of my work,” Nielsen says. A transcendental landscape, one might say, that reflects the conditions of its possibility within the image. It is about the genre of landscape, she agrees, which in art history has been addressed by few women. “I work at the edge of this space, into which one can immerse oneself and from which one is simultaneously repelled. How do we project ourselves into the world? And how are we pushed back from it? That’s the landscape in question. And its ruin.”

Asked what she means by this, she speaks of her trip to Detroit in 2008, of the sublime as a “shift,” of the present, the fears regarding climate change, and of erosion, an erosion of images she is tracking. She opens the window. On a wild rooftop garden lie printed pictures in rainwater that has collected there, partially overgrown with moss and algae. “Just as today we lose landscapes, we also lose the images of landscapes,” she explains thoughtfully, “that is a ruin, and the images are ruins.” Does she nostalgically lament the loss? Eva Nielsen laughs, an open, joyful laugh. “No, I’m not interested in nostalgia. I want to invite people to connect with images, to see a new reality through them.” Since her birth in 1983 in the Paris suburb of Les Lilas, as the daughter of a Dane and a Frenchwoman, images have accompanied her everyday life. Not only, as for all of us, the images that tower around us via screens and print media like mountains—but also those that within such geological formations form veins of gold and precious stones, images of art.

“My father was a painter,” she narrates, “he moved from Denmark to Paris in 1975 to do a post-diploma at the Beaux-Arts.” She pauses briefly, a smile crosses her face: “he probably could hardly have suspected that his daughter would later become a professor there.” Since 2023, Eva Nielsen has been the head of studio at that renowned art school. Her father, she continues, mainly learned and developed printmaking there. “That was very present in my youth; he taught me a great deal.” One senses she has no problem with following in her father’s footsteps. “Already my grandfather, who worked as a metal turner, was a Sunday painter. My father burned with passion for his art, but was very shy.” The precarious life of an artist deterred her, she continues, taking the gurgling espresso pot off the small stovetop in a corner of the studio. “Too much appropriation, too many money worries,” she says, raising her eyebrows, “not that studying history and literature at Paris 3 offered many prospects of becoming a high-earning professional,” she laughs again.

Art then simply came into her studies—she stopped pushing it back. To her students she always says, she adds earnestly, they should not overthink the message of their images: “Art makers are tightrope walkers, they must create conditions in which something can emerge.” Many motifs of forests, rock formations, crumbling walls alternate in her works with personal photographs, partially found, partly from her own family album, of people who often blur into obscurity. For *Estrand IV* (2024) she crumpled a photographed sunset, then reworked it with acrylic, ink, watercolor. It is as though she works on the removal of the world-image as we know it. Without world-weariness or rhetorical catastrophe. Rather with the tense curiosity of an artist tracking what is to come—and how it may be represented.