

Alain Le Chatelier : From Arcimboldo to St Barth

*Ellen Lampert-Gréaux
Photo: R. Gréaux*

A classical painter trained in Paris, Alain Le Chatelier is back for his annual show at Les Artisans in Gustavia with two collections of new work. The first is a series of paintings that are channeling the spirit of Giuseppe Arcimboldo, a 16th-century Italian painter, known for his optical illusions.



With the same technical skills of trompe-l'œil displayed by Arcimboldo, Le Chatelier has done a series of small paintings that can be turned upside down... in one direction they are faces, in the other direction baskets of fruits and vegetables... a carrot and zucchini becomes noses, chestnuts turn into eyes, a head of cabbage becomes a face with cabbage leaves as a bonnet. Colanders become hats, the chocolate in pain-au-chocolate become eyes in a basket of baked goods that flips to become "Mr. Bread," whose hair is tresses of golden wheat. In a self-portrait of the artist, a whipped cream beard with a pearl at the bottom and a strawberry nose can be turned to reveal a lush dessert with berries and cream, tempting enough to eat.

The second series of new paintings are of Saint Barth, which accent the artist's fascination with the flo-

ra and fauna of the island. "I did a series of pencil sketches when I was here last year that I could work on at home," explains Le Chatelier. These paintings include scenes of Toiny, Saline, and St Jean, studded with deep greens, blues, and purples, as the sky melts into the sea and rock formations loom in the background. A painting of the airport has small planes coming and going, while other paintings embrace the island's salt ponds, with hummingbirds, yellow birds, and butterflies flitting around aloe, cactus, and lilies, with shells, coral, sea urchins, and pearly pink conch shells adding to the landscaped. "The plants are as realistic as possible in terms of their morphology," says Le Chatelier, whose Saint Barth paintings comprise an abundance of blues and greens. "That's how I see the island," he says. "That's how it is, especially after the grays of Paris."

One of the new paintings is a very personal double portrait of the artist and his partner, architect Roland Pichon. The scene is their home in the village of Bérulle in the French countryside. The village cathedral can be seen out of a window and its reflection echoes in the glass. Both men are enveloped in large bouquets of flowers, with various shades of purple, pink, and blue, so that you mainly see their faces. The painter's palette appears along with glasses filled with colored pencils and brushes. A bowl of coffee is ready to drink.

As is often the case, Le Chatelier's new work exhibits his sense of hyper-reality mixed with a dose of fantasy and a splash of humor. There is often an interesting angle, as if the viewer was a bird flying over the scenery and gliding down toward the sea. And as always, the closer you look, the more you see!

Alain Le Chatelier



Friday, February, 14
Cocktail Reception
6:00 pm

at *Les Artisans*

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