

DANIEL VAN DER NOON
the elf of Street Art
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In several countries of northern Europe, formerly occupied by Celtic peoples, you may find defenders of traditions previous to the triumph of Christianity. For those nostalgic for the time of the bards and the druids, the forests still resonate with the murmuring of the fairies and the raised stones shelter invisible beings who have the power to change the nature as the fancy takes them. In Paris, Celtic legends have long disappeared from the urban background and few people remember the "Gallic Parisis" at the origin of the name of the city. However, in the summer of 2019, these centuries-forgotten pagan rituals seemed to be reborn at the corner of two streets in the Marais district: a charm changed into an enchanted domain a sad administrative building that extends its concrete walls from the rue Michel -le-Comte to the rue du Temple. For several days, the neighborhood has been watching a mysterious people sowing multicolored flowers on the sidewalk or climbing the pillars of the building, like druids conquering trees. These geniuses and nymphs whose dance was hypnotising the strollers, followed the voice of a magician named Daniel Van der Noon.

Who is this modern-day Merlin who makes forests of Brocéliande grow on the greyness of the cities? Daniel van der Noon is an English artist based in Denmark, homeland of Hans Christian Andersen. He is himself a storyteller who draws as much from ancestral legends as from everyday anecdotes of our time. But he expresses himself through drawings rather than words and prefers canvases and walls to the pages of books. His work is therefore a narrative in images of which the public can indifferently become the reader or the hero. Chosen from other projects in the "Embellish Paris" competition, the fresco at 95 rue du Temple was produced by Van der Noon with the agency The Street Society. Entitled "Up / Side / Down / Town", it pays tribute to the LGBTQ+ community of the Marais without ever falling into clichés or overly explicit illustrations of homosexual activism. Fifty urban places from the different continents of the world having in common a link with gay culture form this "architectural fancy" outside any closed institution, which anyone can freely pass through bringing their own history. Beyond ornamentation or graffiti, "Up / Side / Down / Town" tears the veil that separates Parisian buildings from the dream city, the impersonal space from the intimate memories, making this ordinary passage a place of exchanges.

As the fresco was about to be completed, a local resident, caught up in this mosaic of painted architectures, asked : "So there is no human being in this city? "

She had not seen, on the last pillar on the right, a window open on the only inhabitant of this imaginary country: in a frame which can only be revealed to the most attentive observers, the face of a young man with glasses underlined by the first name Keith. Daniel Van der Noon pays tribute here to the great artist Keith Haring, whom he designates as honorary citizen of his work. For LGBTQ+ communities, Haring is an icon, but the fresco is more reminiscent of the brilliant street artist with unforgettable performances than the designer swept away at the age of 31 by AIDS. Keith Haring was able to give the popular image the dimensions of the Sistine Chapel, and it is this simplicity devoid of any academic discourse that Daniel van der Noon claims. Should

we qualify his work as naive art? Perhaps, if one understands naivety in its etymological sense of spontaneity, of seeking origins, but without making it synonymous with childishness or credulity. The public quickly confused "simplicity" and "ease". One of the miracles of the "Up / Side / Down / Town" fresco is to give the illusion that this long thought out and expertly calculated work is within the reach of a child. Observe the dancers and acrobats: watching their smiling faces, their nonchalance, their flexibility, one would believe that their performance does not require any effort. However, the slightest of their gesture takes years of work. The scenery that covers the corner of rue du Temple and rue Michel-le-Comte is similar to these feats. The distribution of shapes and colors is a balancing act, the difficulty of which is reinforced by the constraints of space, but its language is within the reach of so many, all ages and all origins combined, that anybody would imagine he can do the same.

In *The Week of Ole Lukoje*, Andersen tells the story of an elf storyteller who appears to children in their dreams and sublimates everything around them: "And then all the flowers in their pots became great trees that 'their long branches extended over the carpet and along the walls, so that the whole room looked like a magnificent grove; and all the branches were covered with flowers, and each flower was more beautiful than a rose"... Is Daniel van der Noon one of those elves from northern mythologies - playful and facetious like a child but more powerful than any adult?

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