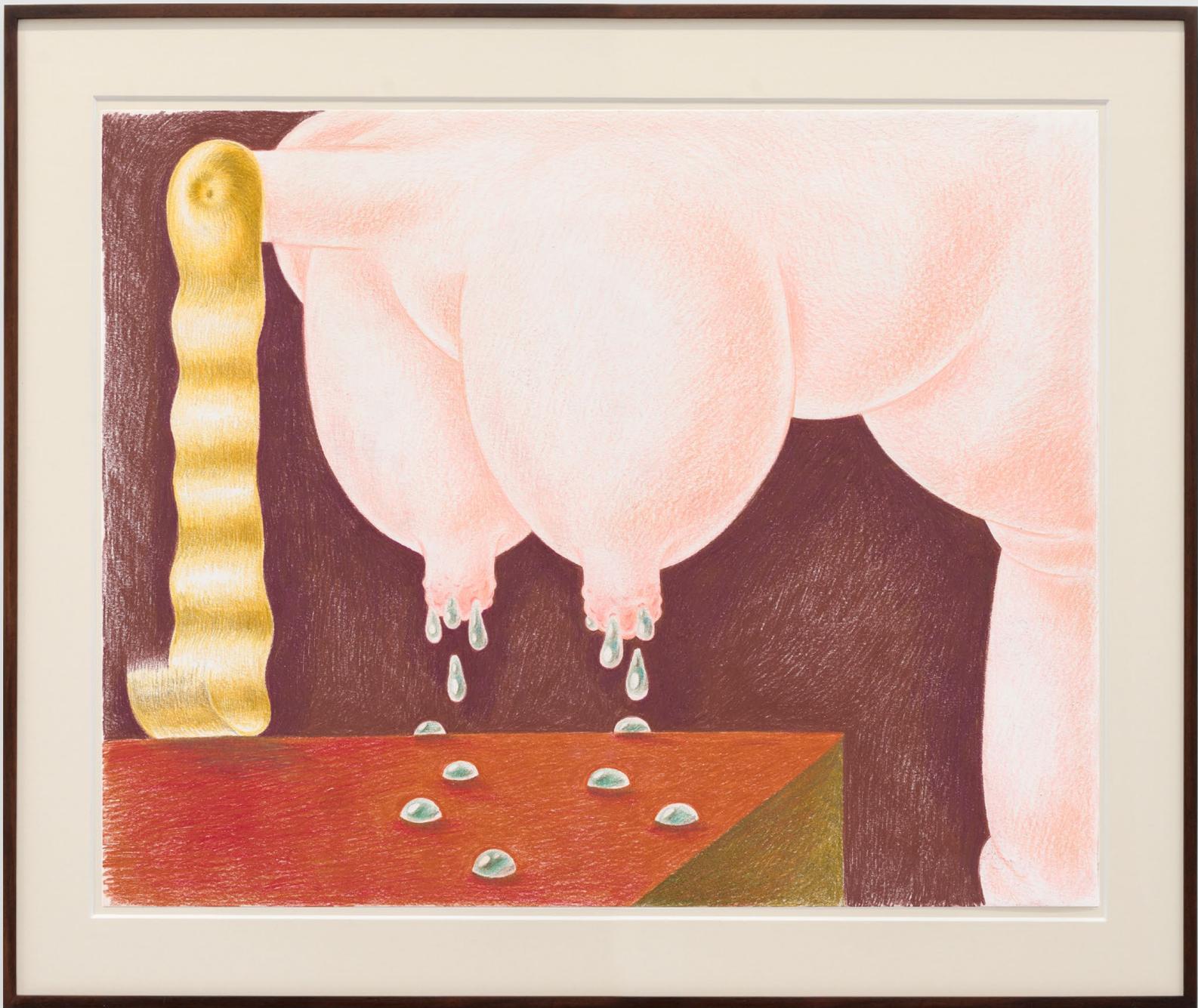


**Galerie Max Hetzler** Berlin | Paris | London

**Louise Bonnet**  
*Untitled, 2021*

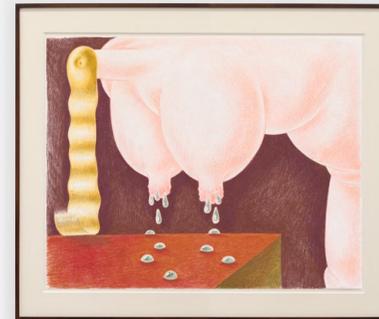
[maxhetzler.com](http://maxhetzler.com)



Louise Bonnet  
*Untitled*, 2021  
coloured pencil on paper  
48.3 x 61 cm.; 19 x 24 in.  
64 x 76.8 cm.; 25 1/8 x 30 1/4 in. (framed)

\$ 25.000,00  
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*Untitled (detail), 2021*

## LOUISE BONNET

born 1970 in Geneva, Switzerland  
lives and works in Los Angeles, USA

*"I think that's my whole practice: to freeze the scary things—rage, death—so you can look at them from the outside. In freezing events, you're able to remove yourself from all these feelings and fully look at them. And they don't look back at you. I think that's why I don't ever paint eyes. You can be a voyeur."<sup>1</sup>*

Louise Bonnet, 2020

Throughout her practice, Louise Bonnet has continuously explored and challenged the confines of figurative painting. Known for her depictions of distorted bodies and exaggerated proportions, the Swiss-born, Los Angeles-based artist translates universal feelings into human form. Often depicted in barren environments, Bonnet's solitary figures capture the current *zeitgeist* while questioning normative ideas about gender, sexuality and shame. Works by the artist are included in the collections of the Denver Art Museum, Denver; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Bowdoin College, Museum of Art, Brunswick.

In *Untitled*, 2021, a new work on paper by Bonnet, a fleshy figure bends forward, exposing its undulating, nude body to the viewer's gaze. Devoid of facial features, the figure's agony is only conceivable from its lactating breasts, from which tear-like droplets cascade down and fall onto a barren surface. Perfectly spherical in shape, the teardrops recall the sorrow depicted in Man Ray's surrealist *Larmes (Tears)*, 1933, of a lamenting woman (fig. 1). Similar to Bonnet's large-scale painting *Wailer*, 2019, the tears in *Untitled* seem to contain a world within, redefining the conventions of sentimentality in aesthetic form (fig. 2).

The uncanny protagonist of *Untitled* is the physical manifestation of contradictions: its facelessness allows for absolute anonymity, whilst its body is exposed to our scrutiny. The figure's body is pushed towards the edges of the composition; at the same time, its bending extremities occupy the majority of the surface in a *horror vacui*-like fashion. Its depiction seems humorous yet provokes a feeling of unease.



Figure 1  
Man Ray  
*Larmes (Tears)*, 1933  
gelatin silver print  
22.9 x 29.8 cm.; 9 x 11 3/4 in.

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles



Figure 2  
Louise Bonnet  
*Wailer*, 2019  
oil on linen  
172.7 x 279.4 cm.; 68 x 110 in.

The use of coloured pencil on paper allows for an interplay of different opacities of hues, sheens and densities, applied by Bonnet to carefully insinuate the figure in the deserted interior. The fair-skinned protagonist with its long, carefully coiffed hair stands in strong contrast to the minimalist background kept in red and ochre tones, creating a *chiaroscuro* effect that further intensifies the spotlight set on the solitary character.

Instead of creating a narrative, Bonnet allows us a glimpse into the figure's emotional turmoil, seemingly suspended in time. This cinematographic quality of *Untitled* reflects the artist's deep appreciation for the work of film directors such as Alfred Hitchcock and David Cronenberg. The suspenseful frozen moment is visible in earlier works such as *Untitled*, 2017, where an androgenous figure is captured in similar agony (fig. 3). While Bonnet's characters are exposed to our watchful gaze, the artist treats them with respect and compassion, a feeling in turn reciprocated by the viewer.

Deeply rooted in art historical tradition, *Untitled* reflects the artist's ongoing exploration of Christian medieval iconography and painterly technique. As argued by Flavia Frigeri, "fragments of art-historical memory are, in fact, called to mind by the lusciously tactile forms, which hark back to a system of highlights and shadows reminiscent of Old Master paintings."<sup>2</sup> One might draw a visual comparison to Jean Fouquet's *Melun Diptych*, c. 1542, which contrasts values of chastity and motherhood in the form of a highly stylised and sexualised Madonna figure (fig. 4). *Untitled* echoes this form of suspended narrative, while subverting the trope of the traditional female portrait, intended to be consumed by the predominantly male gaze. Instead, Bonnet's work positions itself in line with the practice of Surrealist painters like Dorothea Tanning, who captured the body with the ambition to reclaim its agency and identity (fig. 5). With *Untitled*, Bonnet firmly positions herself in this art historical narrative by presenting us with an image of existential dread that further destabilises and questions traditional conceptions of femininity.<sup>3</sup>

Converging ideas of beauty and ugliness, power and helplessness, *Untitled* questions societal norms by bringing our attention to bodily features traditionally shamed and often concealed. Winding its voluminous body and secreting unidentifiable fluids, Bonnet's protagonist forces us to confront and accept our own animal nature.



Figure 3  
Louise Bonnet  
*Untitled*, 2017  
coloured pencil on paper  
27.9 x 35.6 cm.; 11 x 14 in.

**Bowdoin College, Museum of Art, Brunswick**



Figure 4  
Jean Fouquet  
*Virgin and Child Surrounded by Angels*,  
from the *Melun Diptych*, c. 1542  
tempera on panel  
93 x 85 cm.; 36 5/8 x 33 1/2 in.

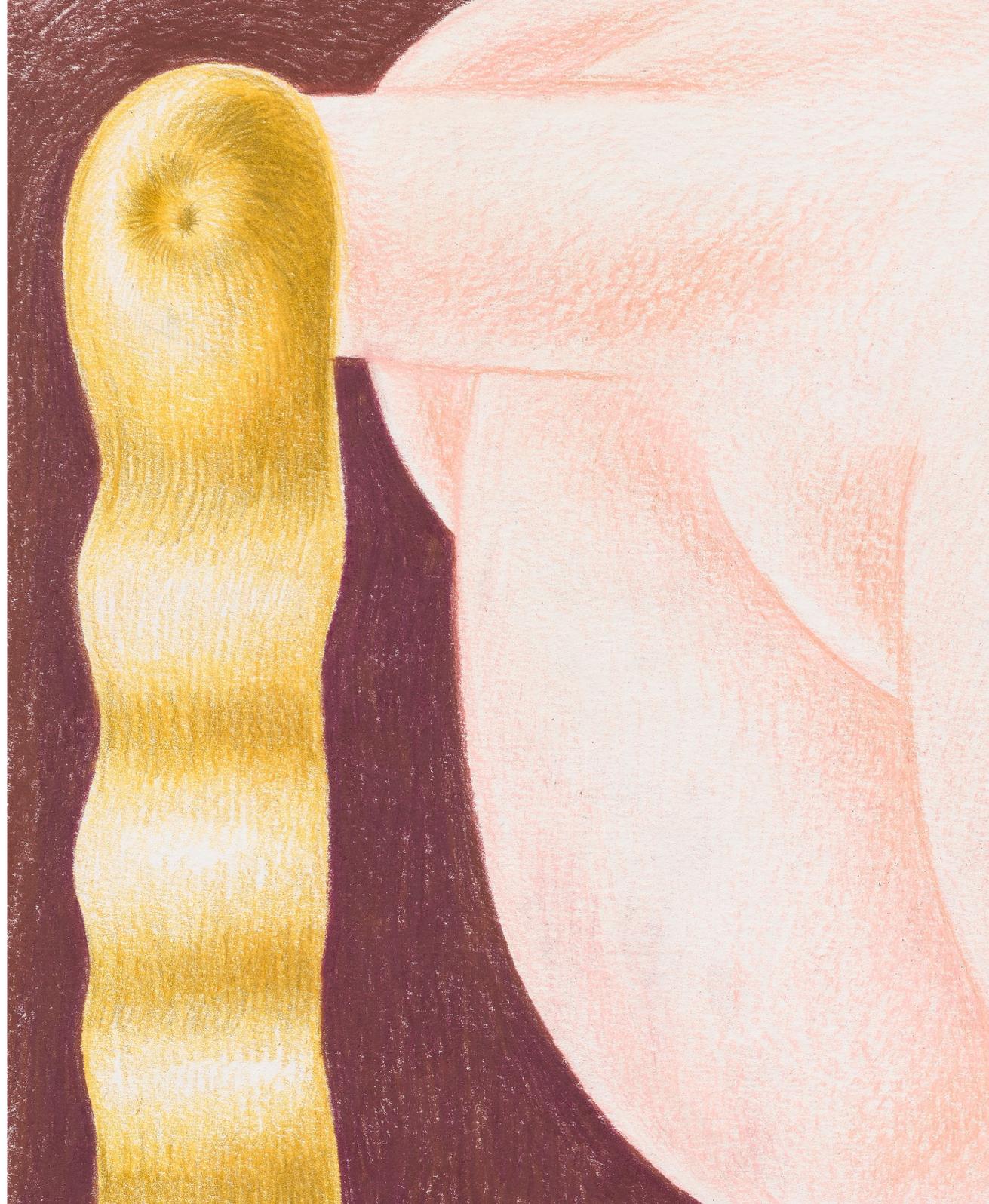
**Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp**



Figure 5  
Dorothea Tanning  
*Voltage*, 1942  
oil on canvas  
28.2 x 30.8 cm.;  
11 1/8 x 12 1/8 in.

*“Since [...] 2014, Bonnet has probed the limits of the human body in her pictorial output. Her figures are at once monumental and helpless, their physicality is pushed to the limits of plausibility, treading the fine line between beauty and ugliness. In the artist’s representations, exaggeration and physical constraint take the lead, as single bodies fill the canvases stretching and bending in uncomfortable postures. Their sense of unease is palpable and made even more so by their extreme physiognomies. Feelings of fear, loss and neglect are evoked by these figures, whose bodies map out the effects of the mind. Caught in a push and pull between action and inertia, Bonnet’s imagined beings are in a perennial state of tension. Fundamentally through her eclectic approach to figurative painting Bonnet challenges and addresses normative aesthetic values, as well as ideas concerning identity and representation.”<sup>4</sup>*

Flavia Frigeri, 2020



opposite: *Untitled* (detail), 2021



Louise Bonnet, Galerie Max Hetzler, London, 2020



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*“What happens to the body is completely connected to what happens in your head. It turns out that [in my work] the bodies [have openings] that look like penises and vaginas, and I don’t really set out for that to happen. But I think the openings in the body are where shame happens, but you always cover it. There are all these rules about all the openings in the body, right? Like, things leaking out—that can’t happen. That’s really interesting to me, just the body out of control, or things happening to the body and how you would react to it.”<sup>5</sup>*

Louise Bonnet, 2020





In this video, Louise Bonnet offers a rare insight into her creative process, retracing the making of her painting "Orange Interior" (2019).



Louise Bonnet (\*1970, Geneva) lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent solo exhibitions include Gagosian Gallery, New York (2020); Galerie Max Hetzler (2020 and 2018); Nino Mier Gallery, Los Angeles (2018 and 2016) and Half Gallery, New York (2017), among others. Bonnet's works can be found in the collections of the Denver Art Museum, Denver; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles and Bowdoin College, Museum of Art, Brunswick.

*Untitled* (detail), 2021

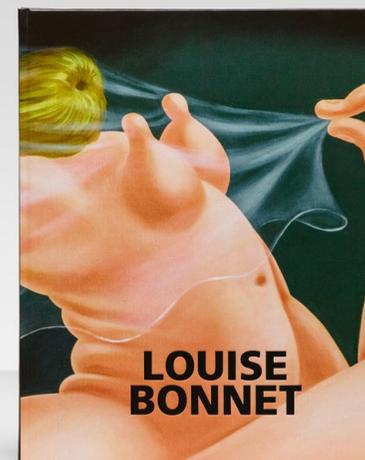
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Further works



An Interview  
with the artist



Publication with an essay  
by Flavia Frigeri

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#### Footnotes

1. L. Bonnet and M. July, 'Louise Bonnet', *Gagosian Quarterly*, Fall 2020, p. 80.
2. Flavia Frigeri, 'The Twilight of Beauty: Louise Bonnet's Interrogation of Bodily Forms', *Louise Bonnet*, exh. cat., Berlin: Galerie Max Hetzler / Holzwarth Publications, 2020, p. 49.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p. 43.
5. L. Bonnet and P. Pobric, 'I Don't Mind Being Repulsive': Swiss Painter Louise Bonnet on the Lure of Ugliness and How Horror Films Inspire Her Work', *Artnet News*, 29 October 2020, <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/louise-bonnet-interview-gagosian-1918282>.

#### Photographic credits

Louise Bonnet, *Untitled*, 2021, Photo: def-image

Man Ray, *Larmes (Tears)*, c. 1933, Courtesy: The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles © Man Ray 2015 Trust / DACS, London 2021.

Louise Bonnet, *Wailer*, 2019, Photo: Joshua\_White / jwpictures.com

Louise Bonnet, *Untitled*, 2017, Courtesy: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Photo: Lee Tyler Thompson

Jean Fouquet, *Madonna Surrounded by Seraphim and Cherubim*, c. 1542, inv. no. 132, Photo: Hugo Maertens, Collection KMSKA - Flemish Community (CC0)

Dorothea Tanning, *Voltage*, 1942, Courtesy: The Dorothea Tanning Foundation © ADAGP, Paris and DACS, London 2021.

Installation view, *Louise Bonnet*, Galerie Max Hetzler, London, 2020, Photo: Andrew Smart, AC Cooper Ltd.

Installation view, *Louise Bonnet*, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin, 2018, Photo: def-image

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