

404 / PRESS RELEASE

Sophie Varin

Display

October 31 — November 23, 2026

Opening Reception: October 31, 15:00–17:00

404 is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Sophie Varin, running from Saturday, October 31 to Monday, November 23, 2026.

Sophie Varin is a French artist based in Brussels, Belgium. In this exhibition, questions of perception, storytelling, and the ways we understand reality unfold through painting and sculpture. The exhibition space itself becomes part of this inquiry, evoking a display booth or storefront window in which the works are presented.

Seeing is where the story
begins

A figure who seems to be looking at us, but is not.

A body situated within a landscape, yet not entirely belonging to it.

A familiar everyday scene that nevertheless appears somehow out of step with reality.

There is something of that “strange taste”¹ in Sophie Varin’s paintings and sculptures.

Varin depicts figures and landscapes that we encounter in our everyday lives, yet the things we thought we knew gradually begin to reveal another face. Reality does not form a single, certain image; instead, it is presented as something that shifts according to what we want to see, or perhaps what we try not to see.

Varin approaches our relationship with reality through the perspective of perception. She is interested in adaptation and mimicry, as well as in how the figures she depicts attempt to understand the environments in which they find themselves.

At the same time, we, as viewers, also become part of that world. Through our curiosity, desires, and, of course, our imagination, different stories are projected onto the images before us. Even a single scene opens up the possibility of different interpretations depending on who is looking.

Dreaming a Dream Upon
Waking

Figures with indistinct contours appear within vividly colored landscapes. A single scene is condensed into a small picture, yet the scene has neither a clear beginning nor an end. There is something dreamlike about Varin’s work.

Drawing on the detective fiction² she created in the past, she has developed the narrative possibilities of painting. Yet her paintings are not intended to explain a single story in a sequential manner.

What they depict is an uncertain moment in time: something may have happened, something may be about to happen, or perhaps nothing has happened at all.

A Small Painting, A Vast World

Varin studied sculpture for many years before turning to painting toward the end of her studies, subsequently developing it as her own artistic language.

One of the most distinctive aspects of her practice is her small-scale oil paintings.

Within these small canvases, expansive landscapes, figures, animals, and interior scenes appear. The paint is diluted before being applied to the surface, while forms painted with broad brushes remain indistinct. Figures and landscapes emerge through blurred light, creating spaces that seem to suggest a boundary between reality and dreams.

Yet the small size of the canvas does not mean that the world within it is small. On the contrary, a rich world certainly unfolds there. Perhaps it is precisely this physical smallness that creates a distance which draws the viewer closer to the image, allowing us to imagine even what is not present within it.

In this exhibition, these qualities of painting are explored from another perspective through the presence of variations and copies of the works. When a painting does not exist solely as a singular object, but instead has versions in different colors kept in storage and available to be exchanged, the question of what a painting is begins to emerge in a different way.

Varin's paintings refuse to explain everything.

What happens within a work is never determined by the artist alone. As the viewer's gaze, memories, desires, and, of course, imagination come into play, a single image begins to hold an infinite number of possibilities.

Perhaps looking at a painting is not about solving a mystery, but rather about allowing oneself, for a while, to remain within a place where the mystery remains a mystery.

Sophie Varin's works do not present us with a single answer as though it were the only correct one. Instead, they quietly ask us how the very act of looking shapes the reality we perceive.

Artist Statement

Display at Detour

The exhibition space at Detour makes me think of a display booth, or a big storefront window. It could be a place for a decor, presentation or set.

This exhibition has one show on display, and extra versions of each works in a storage - as in a furniture shop for instance.

Wondering about what paintings and sculptures to make, I thought of fragmented reenactments of western living-rooms, like a roughly put together theater set, or a doctor's waiting-room. Squeezed between the need to be practical and the wish to be warm and welcoming. Becoming vaguely familiar yet very generic.

My work has been about our need for storytelling and suspense, but seen through the frame of approximation and doubt. For that reason I've been interested in twisting narrative patterns, expectations and archetypal motifs.

Here the motif is painting itself and how it can sometimes become its own self-referential parade.

In movies or books, there are often characters that act as stereotypical facilitators: the Neighbor, the Teacher, the Lover... In this exhibition we have the Still-life, the Self-portrait, the Pastorale and the Copy. They are typical themes of air-quote 'painting'

Each work exists in various colors that can be picked from the specifically made storage. It's an awkward remake, remodelled maquette-size. Like a test or like shyness, or like you can carry 'painting'. These interchangeable miniatures are clumsy little fools performing their simplified selves.

Taro Hirai (1894-1965) coined a term translated as ‘strange taste’ to describe a non-traditional type of detective fiction. Using bizarre psychological twists, or abrupt unsettling endings, it leaves the reader with a peculiar lingering impression. Taro Hirai is better known under the pen name Edogawa Ranpo, being an approximative phonetic reference to Edgar Allan Poe. I believe approximate reference and ‘strange taste’ might be happening here as well.

Notes

¹ “Strange taste” (kimyō na aji) is a term used by Japanese mystery writer Edogawa Ranpo to describe a particular genre of detective or mystery fiction. It refers to works distinguished by their unusual stories and characters rather than conventional, logically resolved mysteries. The term was coined by Ranpo and has no direct equivalent in the English-speaking world.

² Sophie Varin, *Le Pèlerin / The Peregrine*
 Publisher: The Steidz
<https://thesteidz.com/produit/sophie-varin-le-pelerin-the-peregrine/>

Sophie Varin

Born in France in 1993, Sophie Varin lives and works in Brussels, Belgium. She studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris, where she received her DNAP (Diplôme National d’Arts Plastiques), and at Hunter College in New York. She later received an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) from the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam.

Her major solo exhibitions include “Courage” (Galerie Sultana, Paris, France, 2024), “Low Resolution” (MOU Projects, Hong Kong, 2024), and “Halfway There” (12.26 West, Los Angeles, USA, 2021), among others.

Exhibition Information

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 #203, 13 Tsukijimachi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo

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