

THE PHILANTHROPISTS*

Renaud Suanez

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The Power and the Glory

By Óscar Cornago

The modern world sought to undo the mystery of power in order to fit it to the measure of reason. To undo its divine origin by separating its distinct elements: religion, politics, and economy. But there is no power without glory, without mystery. "To say 'God is in you' shows the mystery of the economy," as the philosopher Giorgio Agamben reminds us, identifying glory as the arcanum of power. The mystery of the Trinity, 3 in 1. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; politics, economy, and art. The result remains the same: the equation of power. A mysticism of horror that Renaud Suanez makes us feel in a veiled way behind a surface of complicities, smiles, and cynicism.

Power places us at the centre of history and at the same time casts us out of it, elevating us above the human. To be human and play at being gods. Suanez's pictorial treatment, through the codes of the classical portrait, emphasizes this double temporality, characteristic of the representation of power, placing it at the heart of history, to which the museum's architecture—classical and modern—refers, while at the same time pointing beyond that historical time, which remains suspended, theatricalized, conferring on the portrait an allegorical condition. Any representation of power has something allegorical about it in the literal sense of an obscure, cryptic language. Power needs to be recognised, acclaimed, but also feared; hence its dependence on images, and also its fear that they may betray it, reveal the deception, say something else, or simply say nothing at all. Just an image. Just theatre.

The image is not what we see, but what we do not see in the image, what looks back at us. That is its mystery and its force, which is also what art works with. It is not only a matter of the mystery of an economy—what is the price of art?—but of the economy of a mystery, the administration of a void, of an invention. From this void are born the fears that power feeds, but also the possibility of other plots that might subvert it.

Art and power maintain a circumstantial, self-interested relationship that has nonetheless persisted. A non-constitutive relationship that paradoxically constitutes and perverts them. Art turns to power as a means of survival. Power turns to art as a form of glory whose other face is fear. The Holy Trinity: politics, economy, and art.

**The Philanthropists* was commissioned by Prytanee LLC Art Gallery, a gallery created by artist Núria Güell for her new project *Degenerate Political Art. Epstein-Lang Connection*, Lyon Biennale, 2026.

PRYTANEE LLC

ART GALLERY

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The Appearance of Power

By Hanna Tar

Commissioned by Prytanee Gallery, Renaud Suanez has created a full-length double portrait of American financier Jeffrey Epstein, whose sexual crimes have been widely reported, and Jack Lang, a French politician closely associated with Culture. The image of the two men, who had known each other for several years, was captured in 2019 in footage recorded for the thirtieth anniversary of the Louvre Pyramid. Suanez appropriates this scene, made public as part of the *Epstein Files*, and reconstructs it through the conventions of the grand portraits that populate the museum's galleries. He thus shifts the documentary image towards a representation of power, endowing both figures with an ambiguous grandeur and the prestige that painting has historically reserved for the powerful. Recast in the representation of a criminal, these signs of power reveal their artificial nature, lending this glorification a deliberately cynical dimension.

This transformation first takes place in the treatment of the figures themselves. The attention given to their individualisation and to the rendering of the fabrics draws on the tradition of prestige portraiture, with Van Dyck and Ingres among the artist's references. Epstein appears wearing a coat with an illusionistic fur collar, whose surface Jack Lang lightly touches with his hand. The visible brushwork accompanies the precision of the rendering. The attitudes of the two protagonists extend this staging and heighten its theatricality. Jack Lang's gaze towards Epstein and the physical contact between the two men suggest a sense of complicity and an insular social world. With a gesture, the former minister seems to present the Louvre emerging behind them, while the financier appears already poised to penetrate it.

Working in situ at the Louvre Palace and its glass pyramid, Renaud Suanez chooses an angle where the perspectives of the two architectures intersect. He positions Jack Lang on the side of the museum institution, while Epstein appears in front of the pyramid. The scene thus brings two forms of power into dialogue: the cultural and symbolic capital embodied by Lang and the economic capital represented by Epstein. The construction of this double portrait is reminiscent of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Around the figures, Holbein places globes, books and scientific instruments, objects that signal their belonging to an elite. While in Holbein these objects establish the figures' social position, in Suanez's painting it is the Louvre's dual architecture that performs this role. He turns these two "philanthropists" into contemporary ambassadors of a world where culture, money and power converge, captured in all the confidence of their position, before the fall.

Renaud Suanez

Born in France in 1995, Renaud Suanez lives and works in Brussels. He graduated with great distinction from ENSAV La Cambre in 2019 and also studied at Central Saint Martins as part of an exchange programme. Recipient of the Laurent Moonens Prize and the "Coup de Cœur" Prize awarded by the Friends of La Cambre, he has taken part in residencies at the Fondation Moonens in Brussels and Ateliers Vivegnis in Liège. His practice explores contemporary still life and the art of portraiture. Drawing on the repertoire of Old Master painting, he reactivates its codes through contemporary figures. His work has been presented in solo and group exhibitions in France and internationally.

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