

Romain Bernini

The Stargazers

September 5—October 31, 2026

Opening Saturday, September 5, 6—9pm

Fovea

A painted image is matter; it was energy—movements, gestures, the act of painting. Is it information? Is it only information? Sooner or later, it becomes encoded, encodable, scriptable, and reducible to a kind of underlying text, a series of electrical impulses that allow its seemingly immaterial description to be transmitted and reproduced.

What aspect of the painted image resists its dematerialization?

I look at Romain Bernini's images for a long time. Gradually, the information contained in their light, imprinted on the sensitive surface of my eyeball, breaks down, scattered among the millions of cones and rods that fragment the image into countless pieces, transforming it into a signal that travels up to the brain, where the image takes on the abstract form of a sign.

The image becomes: a closeup on a face, a beard, hair, shadowed eyes, recognizable features. Romain has painted himself.

But an Artificial Intelligence could just as easily, through a reversed and simplified mechanism, transform this embryonic image, these signs, into electrical signals, in order to piece the fragments back together, to recompose, to rematerialize that very image.

Perception on one hand, technique on the other: this is Bernini's fragile image—defeated, shattered, reduced to signs, meaning, and information. I speak, I describe: here is a boy walking on a tightrope, his arms raised. I distinguish the colors, the drips, the yellows, the pinks, and the twilight blue; I spot the mountain, the moon, the sun, the trees; I infer a style from them, and that's it—it's over—everything has been reduced.

And yet, it resists.

It even seems to me that all of Bernini's painting hinges on this very force of resistance, a melancholic force.

How to resist, and to what?

When light reaches the retina, there is a point, in the center of the macula, where most of the cones are concentrated, where the angle of vision is extremely narrow—barely one degree—and where vision is at its maximal intensity. It is here that the resolution, acuity, and the detail of what is seen are at their peak. Vision is narrow but sharp in this highly vascularized area. It is called the "fovea." The term comes from the Latin word for a hollow or pit. And the fovea, indeed, corresponds to a slight depression in the retina.

In this indentation—which acts as the focal point of the retinal image—human visual perception intensifies. It is a tiny and fragile area, yet one where vision almost bursts with hypersensitivity to colors.

I continue to contemplate Romain Bernini's painted images, and I wonder if I am not discovering on the canvas the secret hollow of my retina—or his.

The fovea—the hearth of the fire that seems to burn in some of Romain's paintings—focuses the lights of a scene before their variations stimulate the receptors. Very soon they will turn it into a signal, a code, a sign, and a thought. This is the final place, the final moment when the image is material. There, it is still luminous, rather than electric. It appears as energy rather than information. There, in this fovea—which also evokes the fauve hues and Bernini's original Fauvism—a detail, a precise figure plucked from the imagination or from memory, animates the vague forms around it... As I gaze intently at Romain's images, I have the physical sensation, for a brief moment, of discovering at the heart of the canvas the focal point of a vision—just before it is encoded and processed by the brain—a fleeting optical flash snatched from the eye, before thought and after pure sensation. A sort of fauve form, indeed.

At the ford, as in the final moment of their luminous lives, before becoming symbols, here are these snippets, these flashes: the rustling of foliage, a rocky slope, a crowd already blurred, a vision of Léon Spillaert's vision...

Fragments of a visual melody in high-pitched tones, which almost pierce the retina, pricking the center of the eye like a needle. A dead wasp, in a blue halo... Red sun, yellow sun, green moon. The boy seen from behind, looking off-screen.

From this ballet of images, we sense connections, secret bonds. But there's no need to name them, to define them. It doesn't matter. Bodies, landscapes, moments gone by, intensities stolen from everyday life by an eye, by a man—him, me, us... Who knows?

I look again at this image of a face filling the frame; I see in it a retinal self-portrait—the fleeting, fragile, yet tenacious resistance of his painting to dissolution in the flood of ordinary sensations, to its decomposition in the flow of technological signals, to its evaporation into a world of abstract signs.

And for a moment, the painted image stares back at me like a fovea.

Tristan Garcia