

Dear Caroline,

I'm writing to you from the Place du Conseil, where we are hastily preparing for your arrival. The snow is piling up, and I'm warming myself up with a coffee. The exhibition space is still empty; only the spiral motifs wind across the walls, and I wait for the arrival of your pieces.

I think back to when we began working together, in September 2024. At that time, you were developing research you had begun two years earlier, centered on the study of a mysterious animal I had never encountered before: a bivalve from the mollusk family, the freshwater mussel. Completely new to my eyes and knowledge, you explained to me that it filters water, reacts to its environment, and that its shell records, among other things, variations in temperature and water acidity. Since then, I see it, and look at it, differently.

I was immediately struck by the way you brought this subject into your interests in the image. As we have known each other for a few years, we had already spoken about our shared reflections on landscape (*Summa iOS*, 2019), on reproductions of works of art (*Glitch*, 2022), and now you were opening your research to images produced outside the human. You explore the image through the lens of contemporary ecology, where the living becomes both subject and producer of images.

I also have a personal history with mussels. Having grown up on the Breton coast, I sometimes fished for them in saltwater. At the time, I didn't really question their origin, their name, or their way of life, after all, that wasn't the point. Listening to you speak about the freshwater mussel, collected, exploited for the nacre industry, threatened, protected, little known, brought back these memories with a new intensity. Your work, in a way, reshapes my own perception, both conceptually and intimately, and shifts my gaze toward the non-human. In telling this story, I realize, perhaps naively but honestly, that I had unconsciously maintained a gap between the animal and myself. I had never thought of it as a being with a mode of existence so entangled with its environment and with other living and non-living entities around it. It was vertiginous to think that these species preceded us, living for millions of years, and that they might vanish at our hands. From this thought arose my desire for the invitation: the need, through your work, to renew my own gaze on the living.

And now here we are, in January 2026. To introduce the exhibition, I take great pleasure in thinking about the title you chose: *they built up the picture*. They, he, she, they, construct the image of the living: both the bivalve before us, and those who observe it carefully, those who exploit it, measure it, quantify it, and today, those who preserve it. Ultimately, those who bring it back to us.

I no longer quite know where one begins and the other ends. It is precisely within this network of relations that the image emerges, in the hollow space of attention to life. Your ecological image: the one that addresses gazes and reconsiders them.

For all this, I sincerely thank you.

I return to my coffee, my portable heater, and our to-do lists.
Fingers crossed, everything will be ready on time.

See you very soon,

Thibaud

Marbled paper from the flyleaves of the book
Le voyage de l'Astrolabe (volume on mollusks). 19th century.
Collection: *National museum of natural History*, Paris (MNHN)

