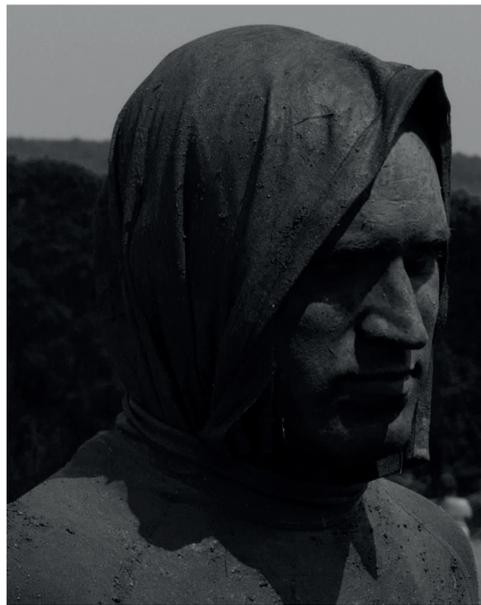




Marie Quéau Le Royaume

Posted on October 24, 2025 by Brad Feuerhelm



I am trying to equip my early-morning brain with enough reference points to connect the dots in Marie Quéau's book *Le Royaume* (Area Books). I should have been better prepared, as I have seen variations of work over the past decade and have been anticipating its release for some time. As I brood over my morning coffee, half-awake, peering through synken orbits at a blaring screen, I can recall some works in which I feel *Le Royaume* shares some association. Still, before that, I want to speak a little bit about Marie's practice, which is multi-layered.

Most of the work that I associate with Marie is appropriative. She has spent innumerable hours sifting through esoteric imagery on the internet and in books, weaving those images together to find a common tongue from which they might speak. She, like Batia Suter, uses volumes of images to reshape the world in accordance with her subjective, solipsistic embrace of it. This can sometimes lead to uncertainty about the authorship position. I recall writing an afterword for one of her books, *Handbook*, in 2019. I remember asking Marie if the images were hers. It was a naive question and one I might have taken less seriously, but I was confused and wanted to know before I began writing about her work. The simple and effective answer was "oui".

Thematically, the way I look at this work now differs from how I have in the past. Whereas I might have seen the work driven by phenomena, I now understand it as ecological, a warning from a different time, a suggestion that all may be turned back to mud without much difficulty, a premonition of the past, written out loud in the present. The book itself is well-designed and carries the hermetic tendencies found in the work. Area Books have been quietly making engaging titles for some time, and it's nice to see the collaboration between the artist and the Area team. The book is another interesting title from an artist whose practice is expansive and progressive.



And it should not really matter, should it? The fact that editing, aggregating, and appropriating is an art form unto itself suggests that these questions are impertinent unless one is interested in process, which I admit that I am. Whereas that was the case for *Handbook*, the reality of *Le Royaume* is different. These are pictures that Marie took between 2017 and 2020 and relate to two festivals, one in France, and one in Brazil, in which enthusiasts gather for a day or so, trawling through the mud, inverting their human form for something more biologically ancestral, turning their selves into blue black salamanders, covered in the soil from which we all slithered initially. The festival in France concedes that it aims to bring people closer to a primordial self — *altered states* (film reference) — in which contemporary humans slither through the silt to enact reenactments of origin stories from our biological past, to understand the land from which we crawled millions of years ago. We construct such rituals carefully. The decision to perform this, or other festivals of the spirit, is an essential human adaptation against the fear of death.



With *Le Royaume*, the hallucinogenic shines through immediately. I am reminded of Martina Hoogland Ivanow's similar mud studies, but then I am rewarded with turning back to the twentieth century. Works by Hiroshi Mahaya, Irving Penn, Martin Guisinde, and other photographers have attuned themselves to mud, often in its soluble form. Still, then, in the case of Penn's studies of Papua New Guinea natives, the dirt is caked into masks and used on the body, similarly to Guisinde's studies of Andean indigenous natives, and presented as mythical. Marie's work expands on this notion, like Hoogland Ivanow, into an expansive catalog of mythic proportions. What is factual, fabricated, or assumed is thrown into question, particularly if you are aware of her previous bodies of work, and it is this doubt or uncertainty that pushes the project into an interesting, nearly non-human form —humanoid, perhaps.

