

carlier | gebauer

press information

Tomasz Kowalski | The Truant

June 5 - July 28, 2012

Opening: Saturday, June 2nd, 6-9pm

carlier | gebauer gallery is pleased to present the second extensive personal exhibition of Tomasz Kowalski, one of the key figures in the young generation of Polish artists.

Developing a strong visual reality with a specific and unique aesthetic and iconography along with a highly personal cosmology and mythology, his work is a reflection on this old medium that painting represents.

Tomasz Kowalski's world establishes a direct and conscious relationship to the history of painting using a wide spectrum of historical references to some of the most famous masters of German expressionism such as George Grosz, Max Beckmann, Otto Dix but also Andrzej Wroblewski as well as graphic design, mainly album covers from the Krautrock, the HIpnosis team. He called this snowballing of references from past to present 'the domino effect' - once you excavating these works, it becomes hard to stop. However, Tomasz Kowalski is also part of a wider trend within contemporary painting.

In *The Truant*, Tomasz Kowalski presents his most recent paintings, drawings and collages which are in a chromatic contrast to his earlier, darker paintings. Nonetheless, these large, vivid paintings - all unsettling, even terrifying images - relate an obscure and intense experience of illness, with endless slippage between the real and the fictional, the dream and the nightmare. *The Truant* as an ambivalent and metaphorical position of the artist, who is withdrawn from the world in a momentarily escapist state - the only position that also allows him and, by extension, the viewers to continue living out of time and to gain the essential distance by which to observe.

As if deep in a daze, Tomasz Kowalski reveals an intimate experience of disease - a subject matter not often explored in the visual art or in literature and one that does not easily lend itself to depiction although it strikes a chord of recognition among everyone.

The artist continues to develop his world by revisiting the recurring mysterious and disturbing figure of the bedridden man - who has existed throughout the history of art. He adds to it a disquieting perception of time where ghostly forms and distorted characters evolve in what we perceive as nightmarish visions provoked by the excesses of fever.

The repetition and *mise en abyme* of certain motifs - the bedridden person, the clocks, the doors, the feverish suffering faces, the tunnel of playing cards - enclose and imprison us in this world inhabited by monstrous, deformed characters. These repetitions probe our most impenetrable depths, which nearly always remain inaccessible to our own consciousness.

This weakened condition indeed conceals some unexpected treasures. As Maurice Blanchot says in *Le Livre à venir*: "Here, the untameable strength within weakness is foreshadowed, just as if - were we to become powerless - the stem of an all too different sort of power would emerge".

At the same time, the paintings provide a great potentiality of imagery, of narrations with an almost childish and naive aesthetic of pleasure parks,

Markgrafenstraße 67 | 10969 Berlin | Germany

Telefon +49 (0)30 2400863 0 | Fax +49 (0)30 2400863 33 | mail@carliergebauer.com | www.carliergebauer.com

fables and fantasy. The artist repeatedly a range of distinct colours - deep and bright reds, blues, greens, yellows, oranges - which amplifies the sensation of painting as an emotional work and the smell, look and feel of being somewhere else, allowing the viewers to feel as if they have trespassed into a fun fair, a sweet shop, a wardrobe full of colourful, vaporous clothes. By juxtaposing seemingly disjointed anecdotes and associations of ideas, Tomasz Kowalski causes the viewers to experience disarticulation and chaos of disease, resurfacing the impressions he intimately felt as a child.

What is striking in these new paintings is the specific use of ghostly forms which appear to float on the surface of the canvas. In almost every work, we can see these ethereal figures haunting the paintings as a certain fascination for nostalgia. These long diaphanous characters do not disappear but, to the contrary, are summoned into being on the edge of return.

These new works, reflecting the deeply personal and painful experience of disease, can also be read as a treatise on the moving forces of the creative process. Paintings are also a way of learning to feel things more intensely, a way of fathoming the depths of being. The altered relationship to the body, a function of disease, is in itself a source of creation - the new position of the body (once vertical, now horizontal) slows down our relationship to the world and generates a different attitude and perspective towards reality. Disease allows us to discover what we usually cannot see.

In his paintings Tomasz Kowalski sheds light on the fragility of the body and our understanding of the world, forcing us to push the limits of perception and of painting as a medium to reveal a previously overshadowed reality. As a watermark, a conception of painting emerges as an attempt to voice what is unspoken in our body as well as in our consciousness. Paradoxically, these paintings present an especially vital picture of sickness as state and experience. In this exhibition, the young Polish artist allows the body to be heard. As Antonin Artaud writes in *Fragments d'un journal d'enfer*: "All things do affect me as they affect my flesh, they coincide with it, so strongly that they even shake it, not beyond. Nothing touches me, nothing interests me that speaks not directly to my flesh".

Born in 1984 in Szczebrzeszyn, Poland, Tomasz Kowalski lives and works between Krakow and Szczebrzeszyn.

Over the five past years, his work has been shown in personal exhibitions at Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowskie Castle, Warsaw, Poland in 2011; Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany in 2009 and also in group exhibitions at Kunsthalle Wien; De Appel, Amsterdam, Netherlands; MUMOK - Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Wien, Austria; S.M.A.K. Ghent, Belgium; Center for Contemporary Art, Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland; Centre Georges, Pompidou, Paris, France; Hartware MedienKunstVerein, Dortmund, Germany; Ursula Blickle Foundation, Kraichtal-Unterowisheim, Germany.

Tomasz Kowalski's work is included in such important public collections such as Centre Pompidou, Paris, France; MUMOK - Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Wien, Austria; Frac des Pays de la Loire, Nantes, France; MOCAP, Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow, Poland.