

# Capitain Petzel

ROSS BLECKNER

*Quid Pro Quo*

September 10 – November 7, 2020

Capitain Petzel is pleased to announce *Quid Pro Quo* by Ross Bleckner, the artist's first solo exhibition at the Berlin gallery.

Since rising to prominence in the midst of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, Bleckner has addressed through painting his awareness of time and societal transition as a means of trying to understand the human condition and its vulnerability. The artist has been reinventing himself from one series of pictures to the next, always referring to the fragility of existence and the human longing for the metaphysical beyond the world of appearances. Death is ubiquitous in the artist's oeuvre, but by seamlessly marrying darkness with beauty, he cultivates a unique painterly language that is both melancholic and sensual.

Bleckner explains that his work has always dealt with subjects that have created ruptures in society. In the 80s, this subject was the epidemic which he covered in his famous *Cell Paintings*. In his more recent works, which are on show at Capitain Petzel, Bleckner confronts what he perceives as the shortcomings of his generation: "These works, made in the solitude of my East Hampton studio, reflect on the failure of one generation to pass a better world along to the next, and the attempt (...) to nevertheless continue to live with a modicum of peace (and) joy." *Quid Pro Quo* chronicles Bleckner's own continual search for truth and beauty. There is a spiritual journey at play in his work that circles around the emotional, the theoretical, and the painterly that reminds us to question our existence.

Throughout the show, the paintings shift in and out of focus, just as Bleckner understands the mind's way of functioning. He paints based on the mutations of his consciousness — from his *Burn Painting* series, which speak of destruction and make use of a blow torch to create hazy, ghostly effects, to his ethereal flower paintings inspired by earlier artists such as Emile Nolde or Edouard Manet, to the simple geometric forms of *After All These Years* which relate to the Buddhist concept of the heart sutra. Constantly vacillating from one series to the next, from one subject to another, Bleckner explores a terrain between biology, psychology and identity, as he deploys a wide range of expressive options, accepting no dividing line between figurative and non-figurative: "As am I, these paintings are restless, conflicted yet focused and expansive. They are simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic. I have made a deal with myself to try to be free, which is my own quid pro quo."

Ross Bleckner (b. 1949, New York) is the youngest artist to receive a mid-career retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, at the age of 45. Bleckner has held solo exhibitions at Neues Museum Nürnberg; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Kunsthalle Zurich; San Francisco MoMA, among others. In March 2021, Bleckner will have a solo exhibition at Le Consortium, Dijon. His works are held in public collections throughout the world, including the MoMA and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; MoCA, Los Angeles; Tate Modern, London; The Astrup Fearnley Collection, Oslo, and Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy.