

KÖNIG GALERIE

NORBERT BISKY

METROCAKE

KÖNIG TOKIO

23 SEPTEMBER - 15 NOVEMBER 2020

The gradual disintegration of a given order is best observed from a distance. Norbert Bisky's astute analyses of changing social conditions often point to the crumbling of modern myths and how easily certainties are overthrown by unforeseeable events. In 2019 and early 2020 Bisky created a series of critically acclaimed works that focused on situations of historical tension endured: the events leading up to the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent rise of chaos, culminating in the hedonistic promise of the city's borderless club life.

This fall, Bisky's work will be shown for the first time ever in Tokyo, in a solo exhibition especially created for the occasion. Still holding on to the subject of the city, the paintings and collages on display each bear reminiscences to Bisky's hometown Berlin, evocating a metropolis within a metropolis 9,000 Kilometres apart.

At the same time, the buoyant escapism that characterized his recent work, only flares up at few points in METROCAKE. The atmosphere has decidedly changed. Bisky's newest paintings shown here were created under the conditions of a global health crisis that brought all mundane amusements to an abrupt halt. Suddenly, Berlin's buzzing urbanity was once again replaced by the leaden silence that had characterized the East Berlin of his childhood.

In Bisky's new paintings, this overlapping of experiences and time domains finds its expression in the recurring motif of multilayered billboards. Torn scraps of paper announcing parties that never took place in *MATRIX* (also the name of a popular Berlin nightclub) or revealing patterns and textures closely associated with underground club culture like the graffiti-stained walls in *Wanksta*, the red and white barrier tape in *Club Sandwich* or the tiles of Alexanderplatz station in the title-giving *Metro Beefcake*.

Peeling away these remnants becomes a sort of urban archeology, partly obscuring and partly releasing the athletic bodies at their center. The exhibition's title METROCAKE is a play on the expression *beefcake* referring to gym-in-flated bodies, while *metro* places them in an eerily lifeless urban environment. Bisky's beautiful boys have seemed lost and ephemeral in previous works, yet something feels different this time. The bodies now no longer seem to serve as desirable antipoles to the surrounding disorder but rather become memorials of what is absent: the fading of color, the lack of abundance, the loss of vitality. Desire becomes blank space filled time after time with perfectly interchangeable products.

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A series of portraits of young men titled *Aussetzer*, *Rookie* and *Rookie II* are maybe the most conciliatory pieces of the exhibition, as the blissful self-absorption in their expressions may provide a way out by withdrawing into oneself.

In addition to the large-format paintings, Bisky's created a number of mirror pieces by cutting up and recomposing paintings on surfaces that reflect their surroundings yet are indifferent to them - Tokio's skyline as seen from the gallery's window's or the onlookers face. Each subject being placed in a preshaped yet dissolving environment, adding layers of meaning with every glance.

Norbert Bisky, born 1970 in Leipzig, lives and works in Berlin and Andalusia. He studied at the Berlin and Madrid University of the Arts and is one of the most successful representatives of contemporary figurative painting. His paintings have been shown in numerous exhibitions in Germany and abroad and belong to the collection of the New York MoMA, among others. The artist translates personal experiences of terror, journeys to Brazil and influences from the media world into color-intensive scenes of beauty, sexuality, violence, and destruction. Norbert Bisky was a visiting professor at the Geneva art academy HEAD from 2008 to 2010 and at the Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Braunschweig from 2016 to 2018. In 2013 he created the stage design for the performance "Masse" for the Berlin State Ballet.

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