

MASSIMODECARLO

ROB PRUITT

MASKS

Massimo De Carlo presents *Masks*, Rob Pruitt's 9th exhibition with the gallery and first solo show at the Palazzo Belgioioso space in Milan. Pruitt's exhibition centres on a new painting series of faces, initially conceived as props for a dance performance that never was. The body of work began with the smaller canvases which are scaled to the human face and were to be held by the dancers as masks. Reimagining a project that began a decade ago of quick gestures over gradient fields, Pruitt continues his pursuit of depicting the complexities of personality and emotion through these simple means. With these new paintings, the facial gestures are cut into the canvas with a razor - destructive and creative at the same time, these gestures are married to an accumulation of gradients, patterns, and prints to create a character.

Throughout his career Rob Pruitt has fine-tuned his ability to express nuanced ideas about culture and society through re-interpretation of common objects and materials, all filtered through a sense of humor and irony. We can see this recognition of practice with the titling of his Aspen Art Museum retrospective in 2013, *Rob Pruitt: an American Folk Artist*. Pruitt sees his practice existing towards the edges of the art world, being drawn more to outsider techniques and commonplace media choices than most of his contemporaries. With his new mask paintings, Pruitt's aesthetic influences are similarly positioned along the periphery, including carved jack-o-lanterns, Mummenschanz, a Swiss theatre troupe, the collage paintings of Enrico Baj, and Saul Steinberg's paper bag masks as documented in *Le Masquerade* by Inge Morath.

The ideas Saul Steinberg discusses regarding his Mask Series are similar to the way Pruitt views the impetus for his new paintings; adding to the discourse about the intentions of disguise and the accepted ways one can metaphorically wear a mask or invent new personas for themselves through costume, makeup, hairstyles, and other facades. Steinberg himself says 'The mask is a protection against revelation.' The idea of masks being used as protection has made an explicit entrance into all of our lives this past year. As we fear to go outdoors or in public settings because of Coronavirus, it's only when we have a mask on that we feel safe. When we're finally able to show our unguarded faces to each other again, will they be the same as we remembered?

A new group of reclaimed furniture costumed and covered with a multitude of colored tapes dominates the gallery's floor. The exhibition was designed by Christoph Radl, transforming the gallery into a vibrant, anti-functional cinema, replacing those forced to close due to Coronavirus restrictions. This installation design simultaneously makes Pruitt's empty chair sculptures the captive audience for his mask paintings and reminds the viewer of the strange and isolating times in which they were created.

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Rob Pruitt was born in Washington D.C. in 1964, and studied at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington D.C. and Parsons School of Design in New York. He lives and works in New York. His work has been included in numerous museum solo exhibitions, including a recent exhibition at Rebuild Foundation, Chicago (2019); Kunsthalle Zurich, curated by Daniel Baumann, Zurich (2017); Brant Foundation, Greenwich, (2015); a mid-career retrospective at Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (2013); Dallas Contemporary, Dallas (2011); Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2015); Kunstverein, Freiburg (2012); Le Consortium, Dijon (2002); and group shows such as: *From Day to Day*, de la Cruz Collection, Miami (2019); *The Shadows Took Shape*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2013); *Pop Life*, Tate Modern (2009); *Mapping the Studio*, Punta Della Dogana/Palazzo Grassi, Venice (2009). In 2009, he debuted the *Rob Pruitt's Annual Art Awards* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, an award show for the art world fashioned after the Oscars. In 2011, he was commissioned by the Public Art Fund to install *The Andy Monument*, a highly polished chrome sculpture of Andy Warhol (replete with shopping bags) in New York's Union Square, near the site of Warhol's Factory.

Hard Facts:

Massimo De Carlo, Milan

Piazza Belgioioso, 2 - 20121 Milan, Italy

From December 1, 2020

Open by appointment Tuesday to Saturday, 11:00 - 18:30

For further information and materials:

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