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Jonathan Meese: *AMAZONENGOLD de LARGE* April 23 – May 22, 2021

PRESS RELEASE

Jonathan Meese (*1970 in Tokyo) is known for his extensive body of work, which includes paintings, installations, performances and sculptures. In all genres, he has developed an independent and unique vocabulary that gives his work diversity, visual energy and quality, driven and sustained by a quest for a rule of art, the dictatorship of art. For *AMAZONENGOLD de LARGE*, the seventh solo exhibition at Sies + Höke, the artist has created new paintings and sculptures in ceramics and bronze in recent months.

Meese has been working with ceramics - one of the oldest cultural techniques of all - for many years. Spontaneous work with a flexible material that allows for incessant changing and adding has always been important for Meese. Just as his paintings, collages, assemblages and readymade sculptures, installations and performances are created in an incessant, often eruptive flow of imagination.

Almost all of the new sculptures are masks. Some, like the *ceramic-vessel soldiers* (2005-2010), are developed from cylindrical vessel forms, with eyes and mouths wide open, the surface of the clay smooth or wildly pressed in with the thumb, the upper edge sometimes folded down in single lobes. Others have mutated into sculptural heads of hybrid creatures with insect eyes and floppy ears. Some have scars: "These are fighters," the artist explains. One ceramic, with its orange glaze and large cut-out eyes and mouth, is unmistakably inspired by pumpkin masks at Halloween. And even an involuntary association with voodoo cult, is confirmed by Meese: "Of course, when I worked on this mask, I was thinking of the James Bond film *Live and Let Die*."

He furrows the clay with his thumb, scrapes it open, digs in rough crosshatchings, smooths here or deliberately leaves raw protrusions there. There are pieces made of black and sand-coloured clay, sometimes both types are combined. While in some masks, which remained without glaze, only the eyes are accentuated with splashes or tears of gold, recently also of platinum, in others the fired colours are overlaid in thick layers. Like the expressive, at times ecstatically spontaneous painter he is on canvas, Meese also applies the glaze to the clay with rapid gesture. The perfect surfaces of classical pottery are not of interest to him, rather the sculpture, in addition to its own meaning and its volume in space, becomes a medium for painting. The two cannot be separated from each other. "Sculpture and painting cross-pollinate each other. That is

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transformation," Meese says about the matter. Some sculptures, such as an alien creature with a pincer head and protruding penis, remain completely unglazed and are covered with rapid lines; in others, glaze surfaces are supplemented by graphic elements.

The ceramic masks lead us to a core of his art that has always played a central role: "For me, art is a performance of masks. I can't even live without a mask," he says. This has nothing to do with the Covid pandemic and the fact that everyone on the globe is wearing medical masks right now. In a recent interview with "Whitehot Magazine", Meese explained: "Without masks we would be totally helpless in dealing with reality. We would be slaves to our limited egos, we would simply be tag-alongs, reality zombies." For Meese, masks are "our protection" and "our potential" against ideologies, dictatorships, terror and all evil. He counters the human evils with the dictatorship of art, which applies to him alone in his *Erzland*. It is the world of his fetish figures, of legends and myths, fictional heroes and anti-heroes as well as real people who made history: From Akhenaten and Nefertiti to Caligula, Tarantula, Napoleon, Mr. Spock, Goldfinger, Zorro, Ahab or Snoopy.

In addition to the ceramics, new bronze sculptures will also be on display. Since 2003, Meese has formed sculptural works from modelling clay, which are then cast in bronze at the Noack foundry in Berlin. With around 100 works, some up to three metres high, these have become a significant body within his oeuvre. "Bronzes are totally timeless, that has always fascinated me," says the artist. Incidentally, it is also an ancient, prehistoric technique which dates back to the third millennium BC. Ancient art, like ceramics.

With the help of ceramics and bronze, Meese turns the mask into a sculpture, a tactile object, but also into a real object that can be placed in front of one's face to cover it. The mask is a "real" mask and at the same time an image of the mask. We are, to use Meese's language, in the *Erzland* of the total mask.