

Anton Kern Gallery

Bendix Harms Houses of Content

May 20 – June 26, 2021

For Immediate Release

May 13, 2021—The fifth exhibition by German artist Bendix Harms at Anton Kern Gallery presents sixteen new paintings. Painted over the last year and a half in his studio in Østerfælden, the artist's farm in the north of Denmark, they are the outcome of the life shared with his wife Mari, Mamon the cat, and a wide array of birds that settle around the farm. The exhibition will run through June 26 and is accompanied by a new 100-page catalog chronicling six exhibitions and including a dedication-poem by fellow painter Joe Bradley.

Sixteen paintings equal sixteen Houses of Content. Harms could not be clearer about how to read his work. The paintings house the content, and the content determines the outcome of the paintings. They are the inevitable consequence of his engagement and, most of all, his close relationship with the subjects he paints. Calling himself a contentist Harms explains: "I am 1000% convinced that personal experiences will create strong relationships to the painted subjects. And from this moment on the motif begins to talk to the artist and the artist has to deliver adequate and art historically relevant answers, because at the end of an artist's life only one thing matters: the difference of the own work in relation to history."

In an almost Warholian manner, yet completely un-dandy-ish, Harms withdraws from the role of the artist as genius inventor. Rather, he sees himself as an agent or intermediary between his subjects' actions, the plays continuously acted out in front of his eyes, and the paintings to be painted. As if he was taking precise orders from his motif: do it this way! Østerfælden takes on the role of the factory, birds and cats are the Superstars, the artist becomes their extension, or as Harms put it "an employee of my subjects."

During the act of painting, the motif, rather than the artist, is the decision-maker. Method and content collapse into one! There is no distinction between form and content, and herein lies the extravagance and unmistakable character of Harms' painting.



House of Talentos (Mari, Dana, Nicole), 2020
Oil on canvas
90 1/2 x 70 7/8 inches (230 x 180 cm)

The viewer will discover: the artist in his barn-studio, his body inhabited by cats, mice, and Mari in *Used Contentist*; a cat basking in its own outlandish vanity in *Salon Mömske*; the contrast between a strict government, under which it chronically feels like having one leg in prison, and the Danish Friday-evening-sweets-culture in *ØFcatraz*; Mamon the cat building a house from its own nick-names in *Mamonhaus (House of Names)*; three painters, Mari, Dana and Nicole taking over the barn in *House of Talentos (Mari, Dana, Nicole)*; Mamon building her house with compelling content: mice in *House of Content (Multipuds)*; a flock of surviving migratory birds celebrating the sun in *Fight for your Right to see the African Light*; the artist caught in the dilemma of what was the spring of 2020 when the redstart bird arrived from the Sahara at Østerfælden and locked Harms into a prison of responsibility in *AL-RED-CATRAZ (Prison of Spring)*.

The recurring compositional device of the barn's timber structure is a formal blueprint that was gifted to the artist by Rufus, the farm-cat (RIP) and former main subject, by revealing its favorite sleeping places in the beams. This structure, which may initially look like abstract painting, is the perfect scaffold for installing narrative subjects. This anchors the paintings, gives them scale and meaning. Along with the reduced pallet of just two or three colors as well as black and white, this validates the artist's strong sense of economy of means and restraint from painterly self-absorption in favor of giving his subjects room to talk. It is the role of the artist to bring the subject to speak, adequately. In Harms' words: "The motif is the conqueror and decision-maker and I'm expecting even more precise orders from my subjects in the future."

Bendix Harms was born in 1967 in Münster, Germany. He received his M.F.A in 1997 from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Hamburg. He has been the subject of solo exhibitions in Europe, LA and New York. His work is currently included in "Deep Blue" an exhibition curated by Katherine Bradford at the Hall Art Foundation in Reading, VT. Harms' work is part of numerous public and private collections including Deutsche Bank Collection, Frankfurt, Germany; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA. The exhibition *Houses of Content* will be accompanied by a new 100-page catalog including images of six exhibitions and a dedication-poem by fellow painter Joe Bradley. Harms lives in Allerup, Denmark.

Gallery Hours

Tuesday through Saturday
10am – 6pm

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