

Neo Rauch *The Signpost*

November 4–December 18, 2021
533 West 19th Street, New York



Neo Rauch, *Die Pumpe*, 2021. Photo: Uwe Walter. © Neo Rauch / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist, Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig/Berlin and David Zwirner.

David Zwirner is pleased to present *The Signpost*, an exhibition of new paintings by German artist Neo Rauch. On view at the gallery's 533 West 19th Street location, the presentation follows the artist's 2019 exhibition *Propaganda* at David Zwirner Hong Kong, and will mark Rauch's first solo show at the New York gallery since his 2014 exhibition *At the Well*.

Widely celebrated as one of the most influential figurative painters working today, Rauch is known for richly colored and elaborate paintings that contain a repertoire of invented characters, settings, objects, and motifs. At once realistic and familiar, enigmatic and inscrutable, his paintings often hint at broader narratives and histories—seemingly reconnecting with the artistic traditions of realism—yet they are dreamlike and frequently contain disparate and overlapping spaces and forms. As writer Thomas Meaney notes, "Rauch is known for ... huge, dense, ostensibly narrative scenes in which narrative is stubbornly elusive. Events seem to take place in a parallel world. Portions of a canvas can be futuristic, with space-age infrastructure, while elsewhere there may be a sky out of Tiepolo and people who have come from the Napoleonic Wars or some primordial Europe. Rauch's figures are bound together in tight compositions that recall Renaissance art one minute and socialist realism the next, and yet they remain sealed off from one another, unaware of anything around them, and their actions have a suspended quality."¹ Though his art is highly refined and executed with

¹ Thomas Meaney, "Neo Rauch's Antagonistic Art," *The New Yorker* (September 27, 2021), accessed online.

considerable technical skill, Rauch himself stresses the intuitive, deeply personal nature of how he works. As the artist notes, “My process is far less a reflection than it is drawing from the sediments of my past, which occurs in an almost trance-like state.”²

In these new works, Rauch continues to explore figuration and the ambiguous nature of meaning in visual art, while also responding to the his own experiences of the present day. Several of the new works feature prominently positioned signposts, from whence the exhibition gets its title, with arrows and directional markers pointing in myriad directions, seemingly alluding to the disorientation of contemporary life. In the large-scale painting *Wegweiser*, which translates to “signpost” in English, several individuals cluster around a signpost and appear to be bartering with each other. One figure holds bulbous alien-seeming forms with protruding antennae, which mimic the antennae of several larger forms that appear adjacent to the group. These retro-futurist objects have become motifs in many of the artist’s paintings, an example of how forms, figures, and even certain stylistic flourishes exist as personal iconography that Rauch frequently draws upon and reincorporates into his work. Self-referentiality often mixes with art-historical allusions in his paintings, and in this work, a figure with a rucksack recalls Gustave Courbet’s *La Rencontre (Bonjour Monsieur Courbet)* (1854; Musée Fabre, Montpellier, France).

The large diptych *Der Zwiespalt*—meaning “the discord” or “the dichotomy” in German, is presented as one continuous narrative, with the same or related figures appearing multiple times within the compositions. The two panels offer an allegory of art and the experience of the artist, from the private creative domain depicted in the left panel—in which figures in white cultivate flames within a glowing cave—to the right panel, seemingly representing the public realms, where the artwork and the artist are forced to respond to broader social forces. In the center of the composition is an artist being pulled, against his will, into the second panel by figures in black. Rauch paints several signposts within the right panel, one of which is massive and appears broken and toppled over. Figures in red—assistants or supporters of the artist—are shown hauling directional signs toward an unknown underground space, adding additional conceptual and figurative depth to the painting.

Neo Rauch was born in 1960 in Leipzig, where he continues to live and work, and studied at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst. This exhibition marks his ninth solo show with the gallery since he joined in 2000. Previous solo exhibitions at the gallery in New York include *At the Well* (2014), *Heilstätten* (2011), *Neo Rauch* (2008), *Renegaten* (2005), *Neo Rauch* (2002), and *Neo Rauch* (2000), which marked his United States debut. The latest show coincides with *Das Wehr*, the artist’s solo exhibition at Landesmuseum Schloss Heidecksburg, Rudolstadt, Germany, on view through January 16, 2022, and *FLOWERS on the BORDER*, a two-person

² Neo Rauch in an interview with Ena Swansea, *Neo Rauch: Aus dem Boden/From the Floor*. Exh. cat. (New York: The Drawing Center, 2018), p. 28.

exhibition of works by Rauch and his wife and fellow artist Rosa Loy, on view at Space K, Seoul, from October 28, 2021, to January 26, 2022.

Rauch's last solo exhibition in New York was *Neo Rauch: Aus dem Boden/From the Floor*, which was presented at The Drawing Center in 2019, after first being shown at the Des Moines Art Center, Iowa. Also in 2019, Rauch was the subject of a solo exhibition focusing on his work from 2008 to 2019 at Palazzo Pitti, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence. From March to September 2021 *Neo Rauch: Der Beifang* was on view at Gutshaus Steglitz, Berlin.

Rauch has had numerous other solo exhibitions at prominent institutions internationally. *Neo Rauch Dromos Painting 1993–2017* was presented at Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle, Netherlands, in 2018. In 2013, BOZAR – Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels presented a solo show of the artist's work entitled *Neo Rauch: The Obsession of the Demiurge, Selected Works 1993–2012*, and in 2010, his first major museum survey was co-hosted by the Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig and the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich. A version of this survey was shown at the Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, in 2011. Other venues that have presented solo exhibitions over the past decades include the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, Germany (2012; with Rosa Loy); Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden, Germany (2011); Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg, Austria (2011; with Rosa Loy); The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2007); Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague (2007); Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (2006); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (2006); Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga, Spain (2005); Albertina, Vienna (2004); and the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, Netherlands (2002).

The Grafikstiftung Neo Rauch opened in June 2012 in Aschersleben, Germany, where the artist was raised. The foundation is dedicated to maintaining and preserving Rauch's entire graphic oeuvre.

Museum collections that hold works by the artist include the Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Gemeentemuseum, The Hague; Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin; Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum der Bildenden Künste Leipzig; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

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