

## Michaël Borremans *The Acrobat*

April 28–June 4, 2022  
525 West 19th Street, New York



Michaël Borremans, *The Acrobat*, 2021 © Michaël Borremans  
Courtesy the artist and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to announce *The Acrobat*, an exhibition of new paintings by Michaël Borremans, taking place at the gallery's 525 West 19th Street location in New York. This will be the artist's seventh solo exhibition with the gallery and his first in New York since 2011. It follows his 2018 exhibition *Fire from the Sun* at David Zwirner Hong Kong.

Over the last twenty years, Borremans has gained international recognition for his innovative approach to painting. Combining technical mastery with subject matter that defies straightforward interpretation, his charged canvases address universal themes with a specifically contemporary complexity. As the artist notes, "I try to be introspective in painting, to have a certain silence in the image.... I want to create an image that just sticks out and doesn't leave you alone. That could also be due to something irritating I put into the work, or an element of beauty. It can be both."<sup>1</sup>

Created over the last two years during the global pandemic, the eight portraits and seven scenographic compositions in *The Acrobat* are imbued with pending questions and underlying tensions that operate on multiple registers. Borremans seemingly revisits subject matter from his own body of work, introducing new and varied meanings in every iteration of his mysterious compositions. As the writer Katya Tylevich observes, "Yes, these are paintings made across two years of a global pandemic, and an allegory of isolation leaps out in a puff of confetti. Then again, Borremans's works have always cautioned against standing too close."<sup>2</sup>

The painting from which the exhibition takes its title, *The Acrobat* (2021), depicts the bust of an androgynous figure in three-quarters profile, wearing a rose-pink balaclava, a recent recurring motif for

<sup>1</sup> Michaël Borremans, quoted in Daiga Rudzāte, "White Canvas Is Ugly: An Interview with Artist Michaël Borremans," *Arterritory.com*, March 11, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Katya Tylevich, in *Michaël Borremans: The Acrobat*. Exh. cat. (New York: David Zwirner Books, 2022), p. 26.

the artist, which appears again here in the painting *The Double* (2022). Borremans also paints his subjects in reflective hooded puffers, seemingly situating them in our present day, though little is revealed about the setting in which they are shown. Rusty pigment is smeared over faces and arms in *The Racer* and *The Cutter* (both 2022). In his portraiture, these familiar visual cues serve simultaneously to invite viewers in and to keep them at bay. Titles such as *The Pilot* (2021), *The Apprentice* (2022), and *The Witch* (2022) further connect the portrayed to certain historical archetypes, yet resist narrativization. The lack of specific context in the work provides an open yet intensely charged atmosphere.

In addition to portraits that honor and subvert the associations of the genre, several new paintings on panel are realized on an intimate scale that draws the viewer into them. This play with scale is further explored through the paintings' imagery: enigmatic scenes of groups of figures looking at what appear to be large glass vitrines. Depicted from an elevated vantage point, the characters and settings seem staged, as though they are miniature models rather than real figures. In Borremans's characteristic painterly style, these works feature striated brushstrokes that delineate anachronistic backdrops in a palette of earthy browns, greens, and oranges. Devoid of specific historical or geographical markers, *Five Writers (Design for a Sculpture)*, *The Fog (Design for a Sculpture)*, and *With Animals* (all 2021) seem to depict formally dressed characters surveying rectangular, sealed display cases that ostensibly hold other figures in unlikely configurations.

In this recent body of work, the artist continues to explore surface and artifice in his careful consideration of mise-en-scène. As Tylevich notes, "Art is just one object with which to fill a vitrine. Mounted butterflies another, cuts of meat or war medals other still. As metaphors, the contents of Borremans's display cases are any or all of the above. It is the vitrine, and not the human, that is the recurring character across *The Acrobat's* landscape paintings, which really aren't landscapes, deceitful as they are, just as *The Acrobat's* portraits really aren't portraits. The vitrine has a mystical quality here. Despite the nature surrounding it, the glass remains clean of tree sap, bird droppings, and fingerprints. It is, apparently, a newcomer. Somebody offstage might care devotionally for the structure, perhaps the artist himself."<sup>3</sup>

*The Acrobat* will be accompanied by a publication including a new text by Katya Tylevich, forthcoming from David Zwirner Books.

Michaël Borremans was born in 1963 in Geraardsbergen, Belgium, and in 1996 he received his M.F.A. from Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst, Campus St. Lucas, in Ghent. Borremans continues to live and work in Ghent. David Zwirner has represented his works since 2001. Previous solo exhibitions at the gallery include *Fire from the Sun* (Hong Kong, 2018), *Black Mould* (London, 2015), *The Devil's Dress* (New York, 2011), *Taking Turns* (New York, 2009), *Horse Hunting* (New York, 2006), and *Trickland* (New York, 2003).

Borremans's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at a number of prominent institutions. In 2020, the two-person presentation *Michaël Borremans | Mark Manders: Double Silence* was on view at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan. Also in 2020, *Michaël Borremans: The Duck* was on view at the Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague. *Michaël Borremans: Fixture* was presented at the Centro de Arte Contemporáneo de Málaga in 2015–2016. A major museum survey, *Michaël Borremans: As sweet as it gets*, which included one hundred works from the past two decades, was on view at the Palais

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 2014. The exhibition traveled later in the year to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, followed by the Dallas Museum of Art in 2015. *Michaël Borremans: The Advantage*, the artist's first museum solo show in Japan, was also on view in 2014 at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. In 2011, *Michaël Borremans: Eating the Beard*, a comprehensive solo show, was presented at the Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart, and traveled to the Múcsarnok Kunsthalle, Budapest, and the Kunsthalle Helsinki. In 2010, he had a solo exhibition at the Kunstneres Hus in Oslo, as well as commissioned work on view at the Royal Palace in Brussels. Other venues that have hosted solo exhibitions include the kestnergesellschaft, Hanover (2009); de Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam (2007); Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent (2005), which traveled to Parasol unit foundation for contemporary art, London, and the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin; Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio (2005); Kunsthalle Bremerhaven, Germany (2004); and Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel (2004). Work by the artist is held in public collections internationally, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Cleveland Museum of Art; Dallas Museum of Art; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia; The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent; and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

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