

Neo Rauch *Field Signs*

16 November 2023–24 February 2024
5–6/F, H Queen's,
80 Queen's Road Central,
Hong Kong



Neo Rauch, *Feldzeichen*, 2023. © Neo Rauch/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo by Uwe Walter, Berlin. Courtesy the artist, Galerie EIGEN + ART Leipzig/Berlin, and David Zwirner.

David Zwirner is pleased to announce *Field Signs*, an exhibition of new paintings by German artist Neo Rauch at its Hong Kong location. This presentation follows the artist's 2021 solo exhibition *The Signpost* at David Zwirner New York and marks his second solo show at the Hong Kong gallery, after his 2019 exhibition *Propaganda*. Rauch's work was recently the subject of the 2023 solo exhibition *The Dream of Reason* at MoCo Montpellier Contemporain, France, and *Neo Rauch: Die Mitte*, which was on view at Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle, the Netherlands, in 2022.

Widely celebrated as one of the most influential figurative painters working today, Rauch has gained international acclaim 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.”¹ Though his art is highly refined and executed with considerable technical skill, Rauch himself stresses the intuitive,

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

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

The namesake of the exhibition, *Feldzeichen* (2023), translated as “field signs,” is a large painting that features the titular objects—in particular, examples from ancient Rome—which traditionally serve as emblems for organizing military units and demarcating plots and territories by farmers or soldiers. However, in Rauch’s composition the narrative is more ambiguous: human figures of varying scale and dress engage in perplexing configurations in an interior scene. A woman and a man clad in yellow seemingly argue on the right-hand side of the canvas as a tiny fire burns in the rural landscape behind them. The same iron sign reappears in *Sonne* (2023), being wielded by a bearded figure who stands under rays of sunlight and among a series of pylons, and again in *Trift* (2023)—meaning “drift” or alternatively “grazing pasture”—in which the placards are utilized as different kinds of instruments. These retro-futurist objects become motifs in 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.

In *Reue* (2023), which is translated as “regret” or “remorse,” a man and a woman in the foreground wearing traditional German dress witness the burning of a house of cards in the clearing of a forest, against a flaming red-orange sky. Rauch includes colorful butterflies and moths in *Spießer* and in *Die Nachtfalterin* (both 2023), symbols that he has returned to repeatedly since the 2010s. In *Spießer* their delicate bodies are stacked neatly on top of each other on poles, while in *Die Nachtfalterin* a large, winged insect is scrutinized by a group of characters that resemble figures painted by French realist artist Gustave Courbet. In Rauch’s words, “I always do my best to understand what the motives for [these symbolic elements’] inclusion in the painting are.... They make a case for the limitless nature of pictorial possibilities—to be honest, I can paint whatever I want; I just have to make sure that it’s right for me.”³ Like other paintings in *Field Signs*, these highly personal compositions exemplify tensions and ambiguities between the past and Rauch’s experiences of the present day while synthesizing the history of art and representation more broadly.

Neo Rauch (b. 1960) was born in Leipzig, where he continues to live and work, and studied at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst. Rauch has been represented by David Zwirner since his first show with the gallery in New York in 2000. His 2019 solo exhibition *Propaganda* at the gallery’s Hong Kong location marked the artist’s first solo presentation in China, and *Neo Rauch: Rondo* was presented in 2016 at the gallery’s London location. Previous solo exhibitions at the gallery in New York include *The Signpost* (2021), *At the Well* (2014), *Heilstätten* (2011),

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.

³ Rauch in an interview with H el ene Trespeuch, “Timeless, Evocative, and Singular,” in *Neo Rauch: The Dream of Reason*. Exh. cat. (Paris: Bernard Chauveau  dition; Montpellier, France: MoCo Montpellier Contemporain, 2023), p. xiii.

Neo Rauch (2008), *Renegaten* (2005), *Neo Rauch* (2002), and the aforementioned *Neo Rauch* (2000).

Rauch's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at prominent institutions internationally. In 2023, his solo exhibition *The Dream of Reason* was presented at MoCo Montpellier Contemporain, France. In 2022–2023, *Neo Rauch: Wegzehr*, an exhibition of his works on paper, was shown at the Drents Museum, Assen, and *Neo Rauch: Die Mitte* was on view at Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle, both in the Netherlands. *Neo Rauch – Works from 2008 to 2019* was on view at the Palazzo Pitti, Florence, in 2019–2020. *Neo Rauch: Aus dem Boden* was presented in 2018–2019 at Des Moines Art Center, Iowa, and traveled to The Drawing Center, New York. *Neo Rauch: Dromos, Painting 1993–2017* was presented at Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle, the 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 cohosted 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 which have presented solo exhibitions include the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, Germany (2012); Museum Frieder Burda, Baden-Baden, Germany (2011); Essl Museum, Klosterneuburg, Austria (2011); 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, the Netherlands (2002).

In 2012, the Grafikstiftung Neo Rauch opened in Aschersleben, Germany, where the artist was raised. The foundation is dedicated to maintaining and preserving Rauch's entire graphic oeuvre. In celebration of its ten-year anniversary, the Grafikstiftung Neo Rauch opened an exhibition of Rauch's prints made since 1988, which is on view through April 28, 2024.

Institutional collections that hold works by the artist include the Albertina Museum, Vienna; Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht, the Netherlands; The Broad, Los Angeles; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Denver Museum of Art; the Des Moines Art Center, Iowa; Fondation Beyeler, Basel; Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence; 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; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, the Netherlands; National Gallery of Ottawa, Canada; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; San Francisco Museum of Art; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Space K, Seoul; and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, among others.

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