

## Pablo Bronstein

### *Cakehole*

4th October - 18th November 2023

Herald St is delighted to announce *Cakehole*, an exhibition of new paintings by Pablo Bronstein opening in October at the gallery's East London premises. The presentation will feature a suite of acrylics on paper in antique frames, ranging in size from domestically intimate to dramatically monumental and devoted to the subject of food. Dripping with flourishes and vibrantly jewel-toned, the works are immediately enticing in Bronstein's characteristic style. A closer reading of the contained narratives reveals a mordant undercurrent, offering a biting commentary on taste and hinting, occasionally screaming, of troubles beneath a gilded exterior. *Cakehole* will also include a new short film by Bronstein satirising the citrus industry through exaggerated characters and dialogues.

A number of works in the exhibition are rooted in the canonical arc of still lifes, with touchstones spanning Dutch *vanitas* to early forms of commercial advertising. *Flemish Sauceboat* and *Lamb Chops on Dish* directly reference old masters, respectively Cornelis van Haarlem and Peter Paul Rubens, and depict dinner tablescapes adorned with violent and sensual entanglements of muscular bodies and mythical beasts. In *Boozy Glaze*, a volcanic cake oozes a sticky drizzle which runs down its slopes towards dark plump glacé cherries. *The Fall* continues a hellish vision, its van Haarlemesque freefalling rebel angels wallowing in the guilt of succumbing to sickly sweet temptations. Bronstein is equally inspired by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century styles, from new methods of printing to the kitsch embraced by Francis Picabia and Giorgio de Chirico. *Chromolithography* celebrates its titular technology, placing a diminutive bottle of Tabasco with off-kilter outlines and colour blocks on a resplendent pedestal of gadrooned platters overflowing with oysters rendered in Impressionistic brushwork. These paintings froth with details and brim with historical cues, embellishing generic foodstuffs with camp hysteria.

Central to *Cakehole* is a Bataillan awareness of circles and cycles, expressed repeatedly in round forms, sites of disposal, and seemingly infinite assembly lines with dour factory workers trapped in Sisyphean processes. Recalling his 2011 exhibition *Pissoir* at Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Bronstein reminds us that the lavish steaks, cakes, and oysters showcased in his works move through the mouth to the anus and ultimately end up as sewage. *Mixing of Clean and Foul Waters* shows an architectural rendering with two views of a neoclassical wastewater treatment plant, its grand fountains of mythological figures spewing rivers of excrement into elegantly symmetrical pools. In *Pit*, a swirling gold cavity encrusted with Baroque scrollwork references George Cruikshank's etching *The Great Pit* (1835), which depicts a vast hole in Aldgate for tipping corpses during the plague of 1665. The assembly lines of *The Artemis of Ephesus*, *Fairytale*, and *Trickle-Down Ornamentation* reveal a different form of production and waste. In the latter, three monumental vases dominate the composition; these are based on Piranesian urns which were widely reproduced during the nineteenth century. Cast in plastic, they emit syrupy dribbles of batter and icing which falls in curlicues on fuchsia bundt cakes, in a language redolent of the gradual trickling down of style from Roman discovery through neoclassical veneration into cheap homeware and tourist tat. These views of conveyor belts nod to Bronstein's earlier paintings, such as the porcelain factories exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, in a solo presentation titled *We Live in Mannerist Times* (2015). More recently, Bronstein has explored consumerism as a prominent theme in *Hell in its Heyday* at Sir John Soane's Museum (2021–22). For this landmark exhibition, he imagined the underworld as a metropolis at the apex of industrial progress, replete with gilded car plants and sumptuous department stores. Continuing the trope of decadent machinery, the works in *Cakehole* are beguiling and alluring with a queasy sense of despair.

Two further works reflect on the extremes of economic power. *Circular Farms and Airport in Sharq El Owainat, Egypt, Seen from Above Through Golden Clouds* reveals a god's-eye view of a massive agri-environment taken from Google Earth, its eerily perfect fields trumping the airport and roads in a show of hyperbolic industrial might. The exhibition is anchored by *Citrus*, a video featuring Bronstein's longtime collaborators Rosalie Wahlfrid and Skyla Bridges. Filmed at the artist's home on an iPhone, it centres on a grotesquely masked figure and her crony assistant in a Spanish-themed cookery fantasy, laying bare and in high derision the marketing forces which drive the food economy.

At first encounter, *Cakehole* feels like entering a fairytale, strolling through long galleries of heavily framed paintings encasing scenes of wonder. What appears at first glance as a heady feast, leaves us with an uneasy aftertaste. As in his earlier architectural drawings and films, Bronstein calls into question elements of high and low, juxtaposing opulence with the banal and gleaming table services with tormented figures and scatological facilities. Simultaneously seduced by exquisite trimmings and trappings and sharply drawing attention to hidden murky realities, he exposes the ridicule of a factory-produced cake which is proudly dressed up for dessert only to end up swirling in sewage.

Text by Émilie Streiff

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#### **Front Space**

(Clockwise from left)

Boozy Glaze

2022

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
81.5 x 66 x 4.4 cm / 32.1 x 26 x 1.7 in  
HS18-PB8158P

Citrus

2023

Film

7 minutes

1/3 + 1AP

HS19-PB8475F

#### **Back Space**

(Clockwise from left)

Flemish Sauceboat

2022

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
81 x 93 x 7 cm / 31.9 x 36.6 x 2.8 in  
HS18-PB8073D

Fairytale

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
129.8 x 84 x 6.2 cm / 51.1 x 33.1 x 2.4 in  
HS19-PB8458P

Lamb Chops on Dish

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
136 x 172 x 8 cm / 53.5 x 67.7 x 3.1 in  
HS19-PB8310P

The Fall

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
52 x 39.5 x 2.6 cm / 20.5 x 15.6 x 1 in  
HS19-PB8460P

Prawns Russe, Grissini

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
66 x 51.8 x 8.5 cm / 26 x 20.4 x 3.3 in  
HS19-PB8479P

Trickle-Down Ornamentation

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
182.5 x 135 x 13.5 cm / 71.9 x 53.1 x 5.3 in  
HS19-PB8420P

Chromolithograph

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
109.3 x 86.9 x 4 cm / 43 x 34.2 x 1.6 in  
HS19-PB8459P

Mixing of Clean and Foul Waters

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
103 x 74.5 x 9 cm / 40.5 x 29.3 x 3.5 in  
HS19-PB8476P

Circular Farms and Airport in Sharq El Owainat, Egypt, Seen from Above  
Through Golden Clouds

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
57.4 x 82.5 x 5.9 cm / 22.6 x 32.5 x 2.3 in  
HS19-PB8471P

Pit

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
126.5 x 129.9 x 10 cm / 49.8 x 51.1 x 3.9 in  
HS19-PB8353P

The Artemis of Ephesus

2023

Ink and acrylic on paper, artist's frame  
175 x 104 x 10 cm / 68.9 x 40.9 x 3.9 in  
HS19-PB8387P

Pablo Bronstein (b. 1977, Buenos Aires) lives and works in London. Selected solo and two-person exhibitions include: *Hell in its Heyday*, Sir John Soane's Museum, London (2021); *Edward Allington and Pablo Bronstein: Spotlight Display*, Tate Britain, London (2020); *Carousel*, OGR, Turin (2019); *Raid the Icebox Now with Pablo Bronstein: Historic Rhode Island Décor*, RISD, Providence, RI (2019); *Conservatism, or the Long Reign of Pseudo-Georgian Architecture*, RIBA, Portland Place, London (2017); *Tate Britain Duveen Commission 2016: Historical Dances in an Antique Setting*, Tate Britain, London (2016); *The Grand Tour*, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, and Chatsworth House, Derbyshire (2015); *Studies in Mannerist Decomposition*, Museo Marino Marini, Florence (2015); *We Live in Mannerist Times*, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2015); *A is Building, B is Architecture*, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2013); *Sketches for Regency Living*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2011); and *Pablo Bronstein at the Met*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (2009). His work is in the institutional collections of Tate, London; the Arts Council Collection, London; the British Museum, London; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the Holburne Museum, Bath; the Government Art Collection, UK; the Museum of Fine Arts Houston; Brooklyn Museum, New York; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, RI; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and Staatsgalerie Stuttgart. Bronstein will have a solo exhibition at Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire in 2025. His work is currently on show as part of Tate Britain's new collection displays and in Chaleur Humaine, Triennale Art & Industrie, FRAC Grand Large - Hauts-de-France and LAAC, Dunkerque.