

ALINA KOPYTSIA, SARAH MARGNETTI, VALENTIN RILLIET (three new positions)

Oct 28 – Dec 21, 2023

Opening: September 27, 6-8pm, Rämistrasse 33, Zurich

Galerie Peter Kilchmann Zurich is pleased to present a group exhibition with three new positions exploring themes of personal freedom, feminism, gender identity, mythology, history, and memory.

As the viewer enters the gallery, they look at *Together Alone* by Sarah Margnetti, a mural that includes the artist's unique approach to the hybridizations of materiality, architecture, and trompe l'œil. The large painting *Shepherd's Fall* introduces them to Valentin Rilliet magic socialist realism. In addition, the embroidery *Turning Into Flowers* by Alina Kopytsia hints at the juxtaposition of ancient and modern considerations in her work.

Sarah Margnetti (b.1983, Monthey, VS, Switzerland), lives and works in Brussels. Margnetti received the Manor Art Prize in 2022 and had a solo show at Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne in the same year.

In three newly produced paintings and an on-site mural on the first floor and through the stairway of the gallery, Margnetti blends the human body with architectural elements in cartoonish hybridizations that challenge notions of gender, sexuality, and domesticity. Her figures move seamlessly through surfaces and change their shape, revealing themselves in trompe l'œil as fragmented parts and architectural materials. Oscillating between objectification and re-appropriation, she depicts her motifs with a timeless understanding of materiality, femininity, and beauty.

The mural *Together Alone* features the artist's skillful depiction of stone, wood, and flesh that she cleverly adopts in architectural settings. She often includes the on-site features of a space – as seen in her including the stairway and the alcove of the gallery. By using the same motives of holes in brick walls she creates a dialogue between the three paintings in the upper part of the gallery space. The motif of the hands that gently care for each other, depicted in organic wooden parts, connects the feet on the stairs. Margnetti finished the work in the days before the opening.

The three paintings *Twisted Time I, II, and III*, show an ascending pair of naked legs dressed with high heels that consist of naked female figures. Margnetti intentionally distorts the perspective in each painting to open up rather than constrain the depicted sequence of motions. This circumstance emphasizes that the paintings are similar but not the same and enables the viewer to connect with each work independently. The few spots with tiny painted hairs on the legs hint at the artist's feminist perspective. Objectifying fantasy meets reality. The heels are humans turned into usable objects, the same way the wearers of high heels tend to be objectified into items of desire.

Valentin Rilliet (b.1996, Geneva, Switzerland), lives and works in Zurich. Rilliet explores the complex exchanges between his Eastern heritage and the Western artistic canon he was brought up with. Repurposing China's folklore and socialist propaganda is the core of his painting practice and his ever-evolving considerations of culture and identity. Rilliet, who himself is of mixed Chinese-Swiss background, has produced five new works for the exhibition in the tradition of historical paintings tied to his autobiography. Rilliet's works are composed of rearranged anachronistic elements from vintage socialist pamphlets, still images from propaganda movies, and subjects that he combines with magical realism.

Throughout Rilliet's paintings, figures and spaces appear disjointed. Iron bars, staffs, limbs, and faces either end abruptly or disappear in cloud-like layers of fire and water. Rilliet keeps the perspective intentionally undefined, opening up the space on the canvas so that several different plains of perspectives make the image appear even larger than it is. The viewer not only enters the image effortlessly, they become part of its scenery and environment. We are in the middle of someone's invocation and perception of a memory, a dream, or a forecast. Historic depictions of early modern and folkloric Chinese sceneries mix with the painter's contemporary interpretations in an anachronistic way.

In *Shepherd's Fall*, a pre-industrial Chinese farmer stands over the possibly slain body of a Japanese soldier. A red fruit (*Rhodea Japonica*) soars in the air. Rilliet discovered in his research that it continuously appears in Chinese propaganda pamphlets. In this case, it might be a dubious symbol for a triumphant moment, an empowering fantasy, or a traumatic memory.

In the painting *Incantations*, a scroll of paper turns into a ghostly figure, the long hairstyle hints at possibly an ancient Chinese spirit of a nobleman, a warrior, or both. It appears the man and the woman wrote a spell together on the paper and, through combined magical force, their apparition manifests.

In *The Night Floods In and How They Shimmered, How They Glimmered, Only the Wind Could Tell*, the artist was inspired by photographs and movie stills from socialist movies and publications from the past fifty years. While still keeping an element of tragedy and even hints of horror, Rilliet reinterpreted the bodies of dead soldiers and fleeing civilians as protagonists in new fantastical but still dramatic adventures. The artist's creative craft breathes new life into some of the original authentic characters of his researched materials.

In the painting *In Search of the Usurper*, Rilliet places a Chinese girl in a cage with a white tiger painted in a traditional Chinese aesthetic. Yet, the unsettling presence does not appear to come from the wild animal, but more so from the group of onlookers, for once all Caucasian. They seem to either try to ease or to aggravate the tiger. Ultimately, they appear more curious than concerned. The girl eats a sweet substance from her fingers that she dabbed from a broken jar while petting the head of the feline creature – a distant childhood memory of the artist that he included in this work.

Alina Kopytsia (b.1983, Poliske, Kyiv Region, Ukraine), lives and works in Zurich. Her embroideries and ceramics explore ambiguity in gender stereotypes and societal and sexual conventions.

In the series *Acting Out the Myth* we see the artist's interpretation of mythological themes and their adoption to the present time. In *Turning Into Flowers* a pan figure is sitting on a psychoanalyst's couch, in another work a domesticated centaur runs on a treadmill, and the mermaid Melusine enjoys a Saturday afternoon relaxing and reading a book. Kopytsia chose many of the protagonists in her works to be female characters since they usually play marginalized characters in ancient tales. She then humanized them and envisioned their daily routines. The Sphinx nowadays might be an official, possibly an immigration agent, with glasses and a laptop, asking questions to applicants. In the embroidery *Endspiel* an android plays chess (a recurring theme for avid chess player Kopytsia) against a human figure. The work references the myth of Galatea, an ivory sculpture that came alive, and the current concerns about the rise of Artificial Intelligence.

In the series *I Love You Too* fantastical creatures and humans are shown in the mirroring setups, a personal comment on how we reflect and mirror each other in relationships. The figures engage in 'everyday' activities such as bicycling, acrobatics, BDSM & bonding, as well as chess playing. The sexual activity in many of the works is in the artist's eye the ultimate measurement of personal freedom. A fundamental right that in her country of origin Ukraine is currently fought out in violent means against a regime that, in the eyes of the artist, openly suppresses these notions.

This series of works is accompanied by an installation that celebrates artists, intellectuals, and performers that are significant for the queer movement. The triangular/variable shaped table arrangement called *Their Party* (2020-present) is an ongoing work and an homage to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979). While Chicago celebrates iconic feminist artists, Kopytsia extends her work to focus on pioneers of non-binary gender identification, bringing their stories and contributions to the forefront. Embroideries with Frida Kahlo, Judith Butler, Grace Jones, Leigh Bowery, and many others adorn the arrangement. Kopytsia's work references the traditional art-historic canon but also includes recent popular culture and social media phenomena. The latest addition to her installation is an embroidery of Canadian transgender artist Cassil. Amidst the embroideries are randomly placed ceramic works. The organic, flowerlike sculptures ambiguously incorporate shapes of male and female genitals, sometimes combined within one sculpture, reflecting non-binary gender considerations.

Kopytsia's techniques, generally associated with female skills, allow her to generate an intriguing juxtaposition between form and content that often includes humor and subtle nudges toward preconceived social constructs and narratives.

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