

Keteleer Gallery is very pleased to present *That Was Then – This Is Now*, a solo exhibition by Helmut Middendorf (°1953, Dinklage, Germany.) Middendorf is a Neo-Expressionist painter with an impressive history. After studying under K.H. Hödicke, Middendorf found his way in the 'bad painting' of the Neue Wilden. He cofounded the legendary Galerie am Moritzplatz, taught experimental film at the Berlin Hochschule der Kunste and had a big and lasting influence on the art scene of the '80s. He never ceases to experiment however. Ranging from painting, drawing, photography, print to collage, abstract to figurative, his works are without fail a striking and pertinent expression of what's happening inside and around himself, making him one of the most renowned German painters of our times.

*That Was Then – This Is Now*, Middendorf's first exhibition with the gallery and in Antwerp, will combine 'historical' paintings with recent paintings and works on paper. The paintings from the late 70s and 80s are inspired by Middendorf's direct surroundings, focusing on the human figure, music scene, night life and the streets of the Kreuzberg district in Berlin, called SO 36, where the artist lived and worked at the time. His paintings from this period are always painted in a spontaneous matter, characterized by their large format and lively, loud, aggressive colours executed in wide, expressive brush strokes. The emphasis was always on intensity while transforming personal experiences in powerful painting.

An insatiable desire for both visual and formal exploration feeds Middendorf's artistic practice and exceptionally varied oeuvre. In *That Was Then – This Is Now*, he showcases this versatility and enduring passion for experimentation. His equally thoughtful as spontaneous compositions are usually drenched with chromatic associations, pregnant image montages and meaningful text fragments. In the five smaller canvasses, Middendorf questions the status of the image and asks the viewer to recalibrate their gaze by using powerful, provocative statements as painterly motives. In the four larger canvasses, the artist blends, without noticeable hierarchy, painted colour fields with collage images, imbuing the abstract compositions with a suggestive layer of meaning.

The exhibition also contains a series of new collages, an integral part of Middendorf's oeuvre. Since the 90s, he systematically collects images from media like newspapers, magazines and advertisements, to use as a starting ground for his collages. Today, he collects images from the internet and particularly from social media as his main source of inspiration. As an active Instagram user, he eagerly shares an eclectic and personal selection of images that reflect his artistic practice.

In his paintings and works on paper, Middendorf seems to navigate effortlessly between composition and deconstruction, between art history and popular culture, between gravitas and humour. With a distinct preference for defiance and relativity, he questions the relationship between image, language, meaning and the pictorial process while pushing the boundaries and possibilities of painting.

The exhibition will be on view 16 March – 27 April, 2024.