

Press Release

Songs before Sunrise

Oliver Bak, Eugène Carrière, Guglielmo Castelli, Enzo Cucchi, Enrico David, Leonor Fini, Anne Imhof, Alexej von Jawlensky, Conny Maier, Rosemarie Trockel, Andro Wekua

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Sprüth Magers, London

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In his poem "Vereinsamt" (1887), Friedrich Nietzsche portrays a bleak winter landscape that can be read as a symbol of existential loneliness and metaphysical longing. The crows caw, the snow looms ominously, and man, feeling uprooted, remains isolated within himself. It is this Symbolist atmosphere that characterises the exhibition *Songs before Sunrise* at Sprüth Magers' London gallery. The artists gathered here explore the tension between inner imagination, historical awareness, and the inescapability of our personal perspective on the world.

The exhibition brings together works by Oliver Bak, Eugène Carrière, Guglielmo Castelli, Enzo Cucchi, Enrico David, Leonor Fini, Anne Imhof, Alexej von Jawlensky, Conny Maier, Rosemarie Trockel and Andro Wekua. Their works interweave past and present in a dreamlike visual language in which the boundaries between reality and imagination are dissolved. By examining the artistic signature of Oliver Bak's pictorial worlds, we recognise a painterly trajectory that reveals a constitutive pictorial hierarchy. Viewing Bak's paintings creates a state of suspended vision. Leonor Fini's *Paysage* (1955) evokes Nietzsche's dark landscape with its soft, intangible forms – a world in which the visible melds with the unconscious. Alexej von Jawlensky, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the human face: in *Kleiner Kopf* (ca. 1922), he reduces form to its essence and creates an inner world that, in Symbolism, points far beyond the individual. His inexhaustible variation of colours and forms resembles a meditation on the human soul itself.

In his paintings, Andro Wekua strives to explore the boundaries between interiority, symbolism and abstraction. He uses a transcendent, dreamlike visual language that he locates in an undefined reality. Eugène Carrière, whose painting exhibits links to Picasso's Blue Period, opens up a new level of perception with his fog-shrouded figures: that which is visible remains in motion, intangible like a memory. His works combine the intuition of Symbolism with an inkling of the avant-gardes to come. With their sculptures, Enzo Cucchi and Enrico David create body images that oscillate between materiality and transience. They ask what remains after disenchantment – when symbols fade and only their traces remain. Anne Imhof's reduced, almost ritualistic forms take this question further and refer to the basic structure of art itself. Both Conny Maier and Guglielmo Castelli work within a pictorial realm that oscillates between intoxication, dream and Symbolist transcendence. While Maier evokes a

state of ecstasy and dissolution through exaggerated physicality and expressive deformation, Castelli creates atmospherically dense spaces in which figures appear to have fallen out of time. His diffuse, often removed figures are reminiscent of the Symbolist idea of an imaginary sphere beyond visible reality, whereby Maier's raw, physical depictions meet Castelli's poetic transcendence in a field of tension between instinct and introspection, matter and vision.

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, art was characterised by the desire to transform the experience of Impressionism into an authentic and truthful interpretation of social reality, as exemplified in the works of Toulouse-Lautrec, for example. These ideas also found expression in an intense reflection of the dramatic inner world of the modern individual. Rosemarie Trockel draws on this artistic attitude by reproducing a slightly reduced oil-on-canvas copy of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's *La Grosse Maria, Vénus de Montmartre* (1884). Trockel adds a mark to the right of the model's left breast and retitles the work *Reborn with Spot* (2011). The concept of rebirth in Trockel's work can be understood metaphorically as a process of overcoming existential loneliness and the transformation of the self through confrontation with the past and the future. Similar to Nietzsche's philosophy, where the "eternal recurrence" calls for constant self-reflection and reinvention, the exhibition *Songs before Sunrise* also focuses on artistic transformation. Here, artists reflect on the past to forge a new perspective on themselves and the world. The artists featured in *Songs before Sunrise* do more than simply imagine a world; they engage in a dialogue with it, navigating between the past, the future and the fleeting moment that is our present.

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