

HAUSER & WIRTH

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Press Release

Philippe Vandenberg Dog Day

Hauser & Wirth Zürich
30 August – 8 November 2014
Opening: Friday 29 August, 6 – 8 pm

Hauser & Wirth is pleased to present the work of the Belgian artist Philippe Vandenberg for the first time in Switzerland. Curated by Harald Falckenberg, 'Philippe Vandenberg. Dog Day' comprises oil paintings that were predominantly created in the decade before Vandenberg's death in 2009. His works testify to his quarrels with himself and the world, as well as an obsession that expresses itself through an enormous creative drive. Above all, these qualities are the result of his endless search for form.

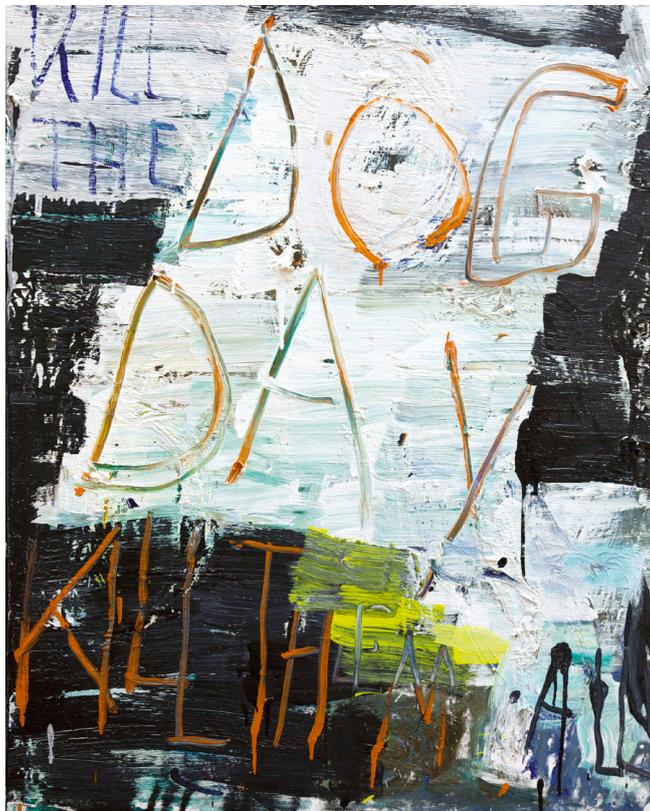
In Vandenberg's second exhibition at Hauser & Wirth, Falckenberg will show the artist as a driven creator who is unable to find peace of mind, and never allows his audience peace of mind either. His work seems to be the

product of an artistic impetus, a visionary and vehement creativity. Painting as an elixir of life is simultaneously his salvation and his torment:

'There is pain in painting: the anguish, the doubt, the panic, the pangs, the obsessive fear of being unable to meet the demands of the canvas... Thus I paint from failure to failure, from hope to hope.'

His paintings stand between the poles of destruction and creation, to the extent that these forces depend on each other. He tirelessly paints over one layer in favour of another. Like a slogan, the command 'Kill them all' is displayed across a canvas. This is a reference to the aspect of destruction within the creative process, to which Vandenberg attributes great importance: destruction as a prerequisite for creating something new.

The endless search for form became the main subject matter for his late works in particular, in which letters and lines, both solid and broken, play an important role. While letters form words



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in some of the paintings in the exhibition, in others they are obscured by smudges of oil paint to the point beyond recognition. Geometric patterns are combined in a seemingly endless repetition. Whether fine strokes or narrow letters, drawn on a multi-layered ground in oil and chalk, his letters become a motif. Word for word, usually somewhat chaotically arranged, they result in fragments of sentences. It is as if language gets in the way of painting, as if it disrupted the paintbrush from working and forced it to write; partial sentences seem to obsessively buzz around his head.

Vandenberg's works open up the depths of human existence to the viewer and expose intense feelings far from pure emotionality. He writes:

'I am an artist of emotion and reflections. I don't mean sentimentalism, the emotional, but the shock of the emotion that triggers, as it were, the reflection. Only reflection creates space.'

It is most likely this reflection that drives him to his limits, that makes him carve the words into the still-wet oil paint, down to the linen, as if he had to banish them out of his head and onto the canvas – sentences of unfathomable despair that cry out for life and death. In these powerful late works, one can never shake the impression that Vandenberg used painting to rid himself of his inner demons.

About the Artist

The Belgian artist Philippe Vandenberg (1952 – 2009) began his studies in literature and art history before turning to painting and graduating from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent, Belgium in 1976.

After several solo and group exhibitions in Europe, Vandenberg exhibited for the first time in New York in 1986, whereupon the Guggenheim Museum acquired one of his paintings for its collection. At the time, Vandenberg was considered one of the most successful Belgian contemporary artists. Several important solo exhibitions followed, including one in 1995 at the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst in Ghent (now the S.M.A.K.), in 1999 at the MuHKA – Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst in Antwerp, and in 2006 with 'L'important c'est le Kamikaze: Oeuvre 2000 – 2006' at the Musée Rimbaud in Charleville-Mézières. The De Pont Museum in Tilburg (2012) and the Maison Rouge in Paris (2014) recently showed works by the artist in dialogue with the Belgian artist Berlinde De Bruyckere.

Solo exhibitions at the Langen Foundation in Neuss and the S.M.A.K. in Ghent are currently being planned.

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Philippe Vandenberg
Untitled
2008
Oil on canvas
100 x 80 cm / 39 3/8 x 31 1/2 in
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