

Netsuke

Galleri Nicolai Wallner is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new works by Christoph Ruckhäberle. The exhibition, titled Netsuke, comes from a Japanese word of the same name which refers to a specific kind of tiny sculptural objects.

Dating back to the 17th century, netsuke were originally designed to serve as practical counterweights to the small purses men tied around their waists that would carry their daily necessities. Over time, the netsuke were transformed from standard everyday objects into highly coveted and spectacularly ornamental objects, becoming symbols of taste and class in a culture where such displays of wealth were highly regulated.

Working with enamel on canvas, Ruckhäberle's latest series reveals a similar history and juxtaposition between the idea of practicality and the idea of ornamentation that can be found in the narrative of painting and portraiture. Each work is a portrait of a woman against a static background. The women and the backgrounds change with each work, allowing for a unique contrast to present itself which in turn blends into a seamless progression. Through subsequent viewing what becomes apparent, is the deliberate manner in which each of the women are posed. Always positioned on the floor, their limbs contorted, their poses are classical in nature yet visibly disjointed.

The idea of the posed subject, of creating a shape with one's body that either augments or diminishes certain things, giving a specific perspective, is in itself decorative. Its purpose is not an everyday one but, much like the netsuke, serves a purpose in the sense that it provides a means to an end of aesthetic investigation.

The turn of the head, the directionality of the gaze, the configuration of the legs and arms, the choice of clothing or lack thereof, the placement of the back sometimes turned towards or away from the viewer—each of these elements are evoked in order to create a push towards the aesthetic or the sublime.

With this in mind, the paintings also highlight the uniqueness of the role of the artist and the relationship that they hold with their subject matter, as each figure has quite literally been placed and positioned in the way in which they would like to see them portrayed, as well as in the way that they would like the spectator to see them portrayed.

Christoph Ruckhäberle (b.1972, Germany) has had critically acclaimed exhibitions at MoCA (Massachusetts), Migros Museum (Zürich), Wels Stadtgalerie (Wels), Arken (Ishøj), Sammlung-Essl (Klosterneuburg), Museum der bildenden Künste (Leipzig), and Museo Nacional de la Estampa (Mexico City) among others. His work is held in public collections such as MoMA (New York), Saatchi Collection (London), Essl Museum - Contemporary Art (Vienna), and The Oblircht Collection (Bremen).