

Sies + Höke Galerie

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Press release

Marcel Dzama: A Flower of Evil

20 May – 2 July 2016, Opening: Friday 20 May, 7-9 pm

In his seventh solo show at Sies + Höke, New-York-based Canadian artist Marcel Dzama (1974) will present new film works, sculpture, and large format drawings alongside a walk-in installation.

The exhibition opens with Dzama's early tableau *Even The Ghost of the Past* (2008-2016): in a darkened room, the torsos of a nude couple can be seen in the scant lighting against the backdrop of a romantic forest landscape amidst all sorts of undergrowth. A stuffed fox seems to observe the scene. The work pays homage to Marcel Duchamp's famous final piece *Étant Donnés*, which can only be viewed through a peephole and shows the nude body of Duchamp's former lover Maria Martins lying on her back with her legs spread apart, placed in a similar forest situation. In his work, Dzama complements the famous scene with a second, male body, thus unifying the couple.

Ever since he created this tableau, Dzama has repeatedly been drawn back to it. It has been exhibited several times, including at Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, and it most recently became a point of departure for the video work *Une danse des bouffons* which was commissioned by the Toronto International Film Festival, and which was also recently given a solo presentation at KW Institute in Berlin. The film alternates between showing Sonic Youth singer Kim Gordon and model Hannelore Knuts in the role of Duchamp's lover waking from the above tableau, only to find herself in a surreal parallel world where she has to save the abducted Marcel Duchamp, who is being held hostage. The figure of a Minotaur, borrowed from Francis Picabia's *L'Adoration du veau*, finally helps the tortured artist hero to be reborn — he is also part of the exhibition as *Beautiful Monster* (2014).

A new short film by the artist, screened onto two walls on the mezzanine gallery, shows the actress Amy Sedaris at a video shoot, where she takes on the role of Marcel Dzama giving arbitrary instructions as a director and chess master to a group of dancers, before she becomes a dancer herself in a psychedelic disco track. The short film provides a preview of Dzama's latest film *A Flower of Evil*, which will premiere this summer. At the start of the year, the two-channel video was screened at New York's Lincoln Center, where the ballet *The Most Incredible Thing* was performed, for which Dzama designed the stage set and costumes. With over 50 dancers, this ballet was one of the New York City Ballet's most elaborate productions in recent years. It is based on a fairy-tale by Hans Christian Andersen that tells of the emergence and destruction of a wondrous clock that has different figures appear to mark each hour. The ballet has dominated Dzama's artistic work over the past few months, and it is thus no surprise that the clock and its characters as well as the set design continue to live on in his current drawings. The artist's largest drawing to date, over two by three meters in size and shown at this exhibition for the first time, is a variation of the set design for *The Most Incredible Thing*. Six architectural models that experiment with daring structures populated by wooden dancers each represent a stage.

In the gallery's first floor space, Dzama takes the subject of marionette-like dancing figures, which appear both in the fairy tale clock from *The Most Incredible Thing* as well as in his drawings and stage designs, to extremes by having a carousel populated by tin figures turning in a circle. With movement, the idea of performance comes into play, referring to the stage and to the theater. At the same time, marionettes are an analogy to the chess figures repeatedly quoted by Dzama: both are controlled by a foreign agency. The carousel becomes an overpowering torture machine, a super-efficient puppeteer who forces his creation with mechanical endurance to dance on in an endless cycle. The appearance of the dolls, initially reminiscent of historical tin toys, takes on a touch of violence and oppression, as often the case in the artist's work. This is Marcel Dzama's political approach: playing on stage and dancing dolls, and the question of who has the control, who is pulling the strings, what is real and what is acted. In this way, he ultimately directs attention to our political reality.

Marcel Dzama was born in 1974 in Winnipeg, Canada, and lives in New York. His solo exhibitions include: *NYCB Art Series presents Marcel Dzama*, David H. Koch Theater, Lincoln Center, New York (2016); *Une danse des bouffons (A jester's dance)*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2015); *Mischief Makes a Move*, World Chess Hall of Fame, St. Louis, Missouri (2015); *Hollow Laughter*, Kunstmuseum Thun (2014); *The never known into the forgotten*, Kunstverein Braunschweig (2011); *A Game of Chess*, Gemeentemuseum The Hague (2011); *Aux mille tours*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal (2010); *Marcel Dzama*, Pinakothek der Moderne Munich (2008). His works can be found in the collections of numerous international museums, such as: MoMA (New York), Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York), Corcoran Gallery of Art (Washington), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Dallas Museum of Art (Dallas), Musée d'art contemporain du Montréal (Montréal), National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), Vancouver Art Gallery (Vancouver), and Tate Modern (London).

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