

W H I T E C U B E

Hong Kong

Magnus Plessen

Mess Dress Mess Undress

24 January – 17 March 2018

White Cube is pleased to present 'Mess Dress Mess Undress', an exhibition of new paintings, drawings and collages by Magnus Plessen. This is Plessen's first exhibition in Hong Kong and features works from his epic series '1914', which has been four years in the making and draws on the themes of life, death and redemption.

The '1914' works are inspired by German pacifist Ernst Friedrich's seminal anti-war book *War Against War* (1924). Featuring photographs of wounded World War I soldiers, Friedrich's book was the first publication that explicitly showed the devastating impact of automatic weapons on the human body. In Plessen's paintings, the artist depicts human subjects radically fractured and removed from context, in compositions that push beyond the traditional parameters of representation. Employing multiple perspectives that don't adhere to recognisable compositional rules or laws of gravity, fractured bodies seem to cohere only through an internal logic of the painting itself. Various motifs of vintage toys, such as a 'jumping jack' with articulated limbs and the flattened clothes created for two-dimensional cardboard 'dressing up' dolls, are incorporated. Similar to earlier works, these paintings obfuscate spatial relationships, with the surface of the canvas appearing as a fluid plane that moves between two and three dimensionality. The relationship between figure and ground upon which our visual sense relies has been permanently dislodged, creating a destabilised, dreamlike and unfamiliar tension.

Plessen explores the mechanisms of the body in the '1914' works, suggesting its physicality is a mechanical composite shadowed always by the notion of death, recalling the wounded soldiers in Friedrich's images who were often 'rebuilt' with new facial features and prosthetic limbs. In these paintings free-floating limbs, heads, hands, breasts and objects such as flowers pots, vases and fruit, are depicted in contrasting tones including deep black, grey, green, beige and flesh pink. These shapes resolve at times into the form of a female nude whose strikingly pale, mask-like face, blood red lips and black hair resemble the features of a doll. Shown both dressed and undressed, with pieces of clothing scattered across the picture, the figure evokes both an actual and metaphysical sense of flatness, like a cardboard cut-out whose body has been assembled from mis-matched parts or fragments.

The title of the exhibition 'Mess Dress Mess Undress' plays, in part, on the double meaning of the word 'mess': referring either to a place where soldiers congregate, socialise or eat, or as a term for disarray, confusion or jumble. This notion of collapse acquires darker connotations when understood through the subject of the paintings – where the theme of dressing up, covering and adorning a 'messed up', destroyed or fragmented body is central.

Also featured in the exhibition are intricate paper collages, the starting point for some of the paintings, where various elements such as clothing and limbs have been cut out and re-introduced into different areas. Similarly to the paintings, the collages suggest both a positive and negative mirror image, an effect heightened by Plessen's practice of rotating his works 90 degrees during their production, in order both to 'locate' the subject and further disrupt his relationship to it. Oscillating between actual perception or physical reality and imagination, his work situates the viewer mid-narrative, within a dense accumulation of subject matter.

Magnus Plessen was born in 1967 in Hamburg and lives with his wife and four sons in Berlin. Solo exhibitions include The Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham MA, USA (2014); Art Institute of Chicago (2005); Espace 315, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2004); K 21, Düsseldorf (2002); and MoMA PS1, New York (2002). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions internationally including 'Images in Painting', Museu Serralves, Porto (2007); 'Imagination Becomes Reality', Sammlung Goetz, Munich (2006) and the Venice Biennale (2003).

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Notes to Editors:

- Admission to White Cube is free.
- White Cube Hong Kong is open Tuesday–Saturday 11am–7pm. Address: G/f, 50 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong +852 2592 2000. Website: whitecube.com
- White Cube's exhibition programme extends across its three gallery spaces: Bermondsey in South London, Mason's Yard in St. James's, London and Hong Kong Central district. Since its inception in 1993, the gallery has exhibited the work of many of the world's most highly acclaimed contemporary artists.
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