

PRESS RELEASE

MICHAEL VAN OFEN

13 APRIL – 19 MAY 2012

OPENING: THURSDAY 12 APRIL, 6 – 8PM

'Van Ofen's gesture is not about returning to convention, but rather revisiting the still-relevant embers of what painting, and only painting, can effect.'

Jens Hoffmann, Kunstmuseum Dieselkraftwerk catalogue, 2011

For his second solo exhibition in London, Michael van Ofen has created a new body of oils premised on paintings from the Nineteenth Century. Using these works as his 'found objects', he dissects the remains of a practice that was poised between the invention of photography and the advent of Modernism. Through his unique visual language of considered, precisely-sculpted brushstrokes, Van Ofen knowingly uses the limitations of these 'objects' as starting points for his own meticulous reinvention.

Van Ofen's paintings are constructed through a wet-on-wet technique, allowing for constant re-working on the canvas and giving them a translucency that lends his subjects a candescent aura. He rejects the gestural or fetishistic approaches of modernist mark making for a more inquisitive approach, in which he revisits historical devices – ranging from genre clichés to sombre palettes and dramatic compositions – to create powerful, stripped-down paintings, in a completely new context. This conceptual reexamining, not reproducing, liberates Van Ofen to "bypass time and build my own historical off-track to come to something new, beautiful, and contemporary."

Théodore Géricault's painting, *Three Trumpeters of the Polish Lancers*, c.1814, provided the starting point for three of Van Ofen's paintings made specifically for the main gallery in this exhibition. Through his radical deconstructions of Géricault's composition, in which only certain colours and figurative elements remain, the atmosphere of the original image is exquisitely honed. Courtly tones of red and gold are emphasized and the precise curve of a red brushstroke forms the impression of a seated horseman. Van Ofen replaces his subjects' trumpets with white lances, providing a sense of balance and geometry but also acting as a linear counterpoint to his more fluid brushstrokes.

With these and other new works referencing paintings by two German Nineteenth Century artists – the landscape painter, Carl Blechen and the portraitist, Franz von Lenbach – Van Ofen treats the actual content of their works with a respectful indifference: relics from a significant moment in history when painting was on the verge of imploding, but relics nonetheless. In adopting paintings themselves as vehicles for his ongoing conceptual enquiries, and carefully gleaning through the dying aspirations of representative painting, with the hindsight of what then countered it, Van Ofen paradoxically reinvigorates our fascination with the medium.

Michael van Ofen (Born in Essen, 1956) lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany. He was recently honoured with a solo show at Kunstmuseum Dieselkraftwerk, Cottbus, Germany (2010), for which a major DISTANZ publication with essays by Jens Hoffmann and Burkhard Meltzer was produced. Recent group shows include Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany (2012), *Painting Between The Lines*, CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco, USA (2011) and *Wrong*, Kunst im Tunnel, Düsseldorf, Germany (2011).

Michael van Ofen will be discussing his work with Roger Tatley in the Culture Now series at the ICA. The talk will be held on Friday 13 April 2012 at 1.15 pm and tickets are £5 / Free to ICA Members.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS OR IMAGES, PLEASE CONTACT RORY MITCHELL
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Michael van Ofen

List of Works

Foyer:



La Défense de Champigny, 2012
Oil on canvas
39 x 41 cm, 15 3/8 x 16 1/8 ins

Main Space (Left to right):



Abend nach der Schlacht bei Wörth (Evening after the Battle of Wörth), 2012
Oil on canvas
80 x 90 cm, 31 1/2 x 35 3/8 ins



Bismarck, 2011
Oil on canvas
53 x 47 cm, 20 7/8 x 18 1/2 ins



Untitled, 2012
Oil on canvas
210 x 170 cm, 82 5/8 x 66 7/8 ins



Piazzetta, 2012
Oil on canvas
47 x 53 cm, 18 1/2 x 20 7/8 ins



Drawing of a Seated Colonel, 2012
Oil on canvas
63 x 57 cm, 24 3/4 x 22 1/2 ins



Horseman, 2012
Oil on canvas
53 x 47 cm, 20 7/8 x 18 1/2 ins

Side Space (Left to right):



Landschaft (C. Blechen), 2012
Oil on canvas
53 x 47 cm, 20 7/8 x 18 1/2 ins



Untitled (Sketch of an Impact), 2009
Oil on canvas
53 x 47 cm, 20 7/8 x 18 1/2 ins



Bismarcks Pferd, 2012
Oil on canvas
48 x 42 cm, 18 7/8 x 16 1/2 ins



Der Dichtende Leutnant (The Rhyming Lieutenant),
2008
Oil on canvas
53 x 47 cm, 20 7/8 x 18 1/2 ins