

CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

EBERHARD HAVEKOST

U SAY LOVE

27 APRIL – 1 JUNE 2019

OPENING: FRIDAY, 26 APRIL, 6 – 8 PM

Florent-Claude Labrouste, the rather unpleasant character from the new Houellebecq novel *Serotonin*, does not want to be prohibited from smoking. He cuts smoke detector cables in hotels with the aid of wire cutters and generously tips employees to secure their silence. “Nicotine is a perfect drug, a simple, hard drug which does not trigger any joy, which is all about shortcomings and remedying those shortcomings.” Welcome to the present. Like the bestselling French author, Berlin-based painter **Eberhard Havekost** holds his cigarettes between his middle and ring finger, while broaching the topic of smoking again and again in his paintings. In one picture, an oversized lighter and ashtray slide into view (*Hotel Opera*, 2018), in another, the painter refers to the disgusting images of rotten teeth and dead blood vessels which have been emblazoned on cigarette and tobacco packets in Europe since May 2016 (*AH*, 2018). A dark, greyish abstraction mutates into a smoker’s lounge full of fog, the kind which have been established at all airports and train stations (*Smokers Area*, 2018).

Contradictions are vast and varied in Havekost’s work. Sometimes they are hard to bear, for their viewers and for their creator. They seem to work against their author. But the canvases do not seem to be any smarter than their audience. They come straight to the point. They provoke a mixture of aversion and desire in their counterparts. On the one hand, these are rough abstractions, “smeared images” created with a paint spatula. On the other hand, Havekost presents ubiquitous motifs, based on his own photography or appropriated media images, held within a kind of semi-darkness. Two sides of the same coin. Havekost proposes that painting can no longer be divided into the abstract and figurative, but rather should be categorized as “reproductive” or “realistic”. With regard to his own image production as well as to the ways of perception, the painter says: “I create pictures with a consciousness of their flatness. With an awareness that what is objective, or what we call reality, immediately dematerialises when you look at it. This means that the way we conceive of reality is already flat and can thus be reproduced.” For his canvases, the artist has developed a “pseudo-scientific format” in 45x80 cm over the years - located somewhere “between a book and a painting for the living room”. Sometimes, Havekost arranges his paintings in triptychs. But even as stand-alones they form a narrative cluster in which all the paintings relate to each other in one way or another. Colours and shapes coagulate into a film which takes place behind former architectural veneers, behind lowered blinds, in spaces seldom visited.

Eberhard Havekost, born in Dresden in 1967, lives and works in Berlin. His works have been exhibited in numerous international exhibitions and can be found in many important collections, including MoMA (New York), Tate (London), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), Städel Museum (Frankfurt/Main), Collection Marx/Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum for the Present (Berlin). He has taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the painting department since 2010. Comprised of almost three dozen new paintings created over the past three years, *U Say Love* is Havekost’s first exhibition at the Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery.

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