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Michael van Ofen *Von der Guillotine zu Waterloo*

Opening: Friday, September 6th, 2019, 6-10 pm
Exhibition: September 7th – October 26th, 2019

PRESS RELEASE

Representation is abstraction. That is a simple fact, but it is a fact that it is easily forgotten. The exhibition: *'Mythos und Symbol - von der Guillotine zu Waterloo'* is a presentation of highly contrived paintings by Michael van Ofen. If you remember that representation is an abstraction, you may be curious about how a representation is abstract. There is a slew of questions to be asked. How does a representation become abstract? How abstract can a representation become and it still function as a representation? What information is lost or manipulated in this process? And, more importantly, what information is created in this process? How is such new information created? Before 'misinformation' and 'disinformation' became words included in newspaper headlines everyday, as they are now, these questions motivated van Ofen's approach to painting. He has intensively explored the capacity of painting to play with information since 1982. In this exhibition van Ofen extends his questioning, to include a deeper investigation into the nature of identification and identity—specifically, the illusory identity for which Europe itself has interminably grasped over the long nineteenth century.

Van Ofen's group of paintings pose rhetorical questions. At first they seem to ask questions like: 'how was the identity of Europe affected by the period of French Revolution?'. Van Ofen has orchestrated the exhibition with a pedagogical approach, it seems. However, behind this posture, which itself is taken from the period of broad Hegelian systematic thinking, there is another question. This project is an intensive investigation of the process of painting as an ideological battle far more than it is an historical analysis of political events. So, actually, van Ofen is in fact asking 'what was created or destroyed in the paintings that relayed the political dreams and political reality of the formation of nation and empire that lead us into the modern day internal and external political borders of Europe? For this exhibition, Van Ofen's collection of source material is strictly limited to visual images produced as ideological tools in the period between 1789 and 1860. His adherence to using the minimal necessary marks required to relay the iconographic forms in them produces abstraction via his peculiar sense of approximation. In this state, they reveal that the role of abstraction is not only vital in making a representation but in fact calibrates the image's iconographic power.

Text: Darryn Ansted

Previous solo exhibitions include: *The symbolic extension of the self from the prospect of the early contemporaries*, Sies + Höke (2016); *Bilder aus Zweihundert Jahren*, JaLiMa Collection, Düsseldorf (2014); *Germania und Italia. The Continuance of the Contemporary*, Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia (2013); *Michael van Ofen: Anton v. Werner*, Johnen Galerie, Berlin (2012); Alison Jacques, London (2012); *Der Abschied der Braut*, dkw kunst.museum.dieselmotoren, Cottbus (2010)

Previous group exhibitions include: *Irony & Idealism*, Kunsthalle Münster (2018); *Irony & Idealism*, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea (2017); *Die Erfindung der Abstraktion*, Akademie – Galerie, Düsseldorf (2016); *Resonance(s)*, Maison Particulière, Brussels (2016); *Das doppelte Bild. Aspekte zeitgenössischer Malerei*, Kunstmuseum Solothurn (2016); *Paintings Between The Lines*, Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown (2016); *Paintings Between The Lines*, Wattis Institute, San Francisco (2011)

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