

The End of History...and the Return of History Painting

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Artist(s) **Diversen**
 When from **30.01** till **08.05.2011**

Exhibition 'The End of History...
 and the Return of History Painting'

Artist(s) Diverse
 Period 30 January – 8 May 2011

The exhibition *The End of History...and the Return of History Painting* focuses on a radical reinterpretation of classic history painting paired with current day events. No tableaux glorifying national unity or pride, the genre's traditional themes, but instead depictions of the awful consequences of nationalism, patriotism, guerrilla conflict, terror and war.

The exhibition takes a critical look at the way in which the mass media treat these topics and in doing so affects the way we see them. 'Fast' media are indebted to the great traditions of art history. Conversely, these new pieces – history painting 2.0 – make analytical use of this fast-paced visual culture.

Spanish guest curator Paco Barragán, who organized the exhibition, draws attention to a new school of artists who infuse history painting – pushed aside by new media like photography, television and the Internet – with new meaning and value. As Barragán notes, "in contemporary society, an image often has a life span of only a few seconds. The longer duration of painting, combined with its static directness, introduces the questions of how and why we look at certain images."

The exhibition features over eighty works by seventeen international artists, including Maryam Najd, Ronald Ophuis and Nicola Verlato.

Verlato's (Verona, Italy 1965) neorealist style evokes the Old Masters. An everyday depiction, such as one of soldiers loading or unloading a plane, is reminiscent of a heroic scene from the high baroque. At the same time, the

dramatic quality of the work calls to mind the effect of an apocalyptic video game.

The raw realistic works of Ronald Ophuis (Hengelo 1968) are reminiscent of classic history painting, in particular of works depicting biblical stories. His war scenes (for instance of Srebrenica and paintings about Birkenau) bring forth strong reactions in the viewer.

Maryam Najd (Teheran, Iran 1965) obscures images from the mass media under a wash of many layers of paint. In response to the recent demonstrations against the regime in Iran, Najd created the series *Masquerade* (2009), in which the veil and mask appear as means for individuals to disguise themselves.

With his work about people who played important roles in terror attacks and wars, among other things, Miguel Aguirre (Lima, Peru 1973) hopes to offer a counterweight to the apathy caused by an excess of media images. "Since most of us aren't witnesses but only passive observers of History, because we often don't see what happens in the world directly but only through others' images, it is necessary to treat them critically."

The title *The End of History* refers to an essay by Francis Fukuyama, in which – in 1989 right before the fall of the Berlin wall – he proclaimed that there will be an end to the great world ideologies, the so-called Big Stories, and thus an end to history itself. 'The end of history', however, did not mean the end of conflicts, wars and violence, as Fukuyama has also noted. Just as the Big Stories have not disappeared neither has the (history of) painting died. They continue to renew themselves as can be seen in *The Return of History Painting*.

Artists

Miguel Aguirre, Pablo Alonso, Pedro Barbeito, Pascal Danz, Sandra Gamarra, Ignacio Goitia, Iñaki Gracenea, Trevor Guthrie, Matthias Köster, Maryam Najd, Ronald Ophuis, Gamaliel Rodriguez, Carlos Salazar, Judy Sirks, Nicola Verlato and Simeón Sáiz.

Patria o Libertad! The guest curator Paco Barragán also developed the exhibition *Patria o Libertad!* On Patriotism, Immigration and Populism in the Cobra Museum in Amstelveen (19 Feb. - 8 May 2011).

The exhibition is a critical exploration of nationalism and patriotism at a time when national identity is strongly questioned by some and passionately defended by others. The combined forces of immigration, globalization and economic recession are generating problems around the world. Neoconservatism brings new meaning to the concepts of 'belonging', 'motherland' and 'nation' as immigration causes tensions between resident and immigrant populations. Patriotism is a key word for those trying to follow a difficult debate in all its vicissitudes. In contemporary art, it is a current theme. In *Patria o Libertad!*, 20 international artists present their visions.

Please click on this link for further information.