

Press information

Peter Stauss | Professional Sleep

November 3 – December 22, 2012

Opening: Friday, November 2, 6 – 9 pm

Having worked mainly in sculpture during the past two years, Peter Stauss has now returned to painting, his original medium. His new work will be on show for the first time in a major solo exhibition at carlier | gebauer.

Peter Stauss' paintings appear wild, animated, and at times almost chaotic. Colour splodges are warring with textures, human figures share the surface with dogs and monkeys, order gives way to uncertainty. The construction of the image does not follow the formal structure of accepted rules of visual perception. There is no foreground, dividing the surface into hierarchies and thereby attributing an illusionary "secondary" status to areas and objects in the background.

All figures in these paintings, no matter if human or animal, can be distinguished from the other surfaces and textures through the meticulously-chosen stroke of the brush which highlights facial features and body shape. They stand in contrast to the composition of the two-dimensional, far more spontaneous and rougher remainder of the painting. Carton-board, the ostensible medium, creates a solid surface that becomes part of the work as it is visible at various points. The larger-sized works are assembled from several individual pieces of carton whose organic format determines the structure of the works. The borders and edges of the carton segments are on the one hand crossed by the figures and gestures and thus partially obscured by them, yet wherever the shapes terminate at the physical edge of a piece of carton and do not continue onto the adjacent carton, they create welcome fractures that prevent the paintings from becoming too much of a homogenous ensemble.

Accident is a part of the creative process. The planes created by the brush alternate with a treatment of the surface space in which elements are arbitrarily obscured then destroyed again. This creates a density of structures and hues which is highly complex, because it was not merely deposited intentionally but grows predominantly out of the shapes which have gained their form from the remainders of a random erasure.

Both figures and sharply-outlined shapes merge into an arrangement which is permanently threatened, and so evokes some sort of loss or memory. To a certain extent, the themes of the paintings continue this idea of insecurity – the dogs and monkeys wearing clothes, almost human in their gestures and poses, their faces portraying the same emotions. Their expressions of suffering, incompetence and disenchantment on the other hand appear to satirise their human counterparts. This represents a subversive restructuring, an attack on the psychology of human constructs of reality.

As an emblem, the dog represents logic and astuteness, he can read tracks and when in doubt is able to choose the right one. Yet at the same time, it is a living creature adept at deferring to the conventions of human society and becoming the faithful companion of its master and owner. Over the course of centuries, humans have

transformed this contradictory relationship between its non-human descent from “raw nature” and the almost unlimited options of its domestication, into a sophisticated strategy for justifying the symbolic order from the primordial basis of the non-human sphere. The paintings of Peter Stauss scrutinise these mechanisms of validation and shifting traditions and power balances.

In “No Body”, the protagonist has long been deprived of his own prominence. Without a body, only equipped with legs and a head, he is literally a “no-body”, taking its cue from a drawing by the British cartoonist and caricaturist William Hogarth. The body has become powerless in face of menace, it has become useless. The dogs populating the upper half of the pictorial space already make use of supernatural powers, applying the magic to breathe new life into the constructivist forms.

The painting “Rotes Atelier” (Red Studio) shows dogs and monkeys hammering away next to each other as if in the forge of Vulcan, while the scene below is reminiscent of a famous moment from the cinema history: Lauren Bacall handing the tied-up Humphrey Bogart a cigarette in the film *The Big Sleep*. In the painting, Stauss has replaced Bacall with a monkey who shares a cigarette with a tied-up human being.

The artist contrasts the eagerness of the hammering workmen – who are, typically enough, not beating on metal but again wrecking constructivist forms as symbols for utopian and idealistic prevarications – with the impotence of the shackled man. The ambivalence between constant pursuit of idealism on the one hand and political impotence on the other is not also reflected in the symbols, coats of arms and insignia worn by the protagonists, both animal and human.

The themes of the paintings appear as an admission of the futility of all intent and volition yet become on closer inspection a metaphor for the realities of humankind’s creative acts within the irreconcilable contradictions of idealism and necessity, affirmation and criticism.

Peter Stauss was born in the South of Germany in 1969 and studied at the University of the Arts in Berlin, where he graduated as master student in the class of Professor Bernd Koberling. He works and lives in Berlin.