

I LOST MY HEART TO A STARSHIP TROOPER

Griffin Gallery
21 Evesham Street
London
W11 4AJ

12th January – 24th February 2017

Private View: Wednesday, 11th January, 6.30 – 8.30pm

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:

GLENN BROWN * LUKE CAULFIELD * GORDON CHEUNG * STEPHANE GRAFF * HENRY HUDSON * NICK HORNBY & SINTA TANTRA * WOLFE VON LENKIEWICZ * MARIELE NEUDECKER * GAVIN TURK



Gavin Turk, *Large Transit Disaster (Blue, Copper & Ochre)*, 2013. Silkscreen on canvas, 190 x 515 cm

Griffin Gallery is delighted to present *I Lost My Heart to a Starship Trooper*, a group exhibition that examines the importance of appropriation and influence in the practices of twelve contemporary artists.

The exhibition has been curated by London-based art consultant Catherine Loewe, who says: *'The exhibition's title comes from the 1978 Hot Gossip song of the same name, and also refers to the artist Glenn Brown, who used the title for one of his paintings, a meticulous rendition of a Rembrandt. Through this appropriation, Brown united something old and almost sacred with something modern, and this, in part, was the genesis of the exhibition. While all of the featured works open up myriad lines of inquiry, from challenging notions of value and authorship to examining modern morality, the show is in essence about the artists' relationship with the art historical canon, from Old Masters to the present.'*

Glenn Brown (b. 1966) is a British artist known for the use of art historical references in his paintings. Starting with reproductions from other artist's works, Glenn Brown transforms the appropriated image by changing its colour, position and size. His grotesque yet fascinating figures appear to be painted with thick impasto, but are actually executed through the application of thin, swirling brushstrokes which create the illusion of almost photographically flat surfaces. There are fewer sculptures than paintings in Brown's oeuvre, but they nevertheless form a central point of his practice. They are created by accumulating thick layers of oil paint over acrylic and fibreglass structures, or over found bronze sculptures. Brown's sculptures stand in stark contrast to his flat paintings, deliberately emphasizing the three-dimensional quality of oil brushstrokes. In the last few years, Glenn Brown has extensively embraced drawing. Still conceptually rooted to art historical references, he stretches, combines, distorts and layers images to create subtle yet complex line-based works. He works with Indian ink, acrylic and oil paint on a variety of papers and panels.

Luke Caulfield's (b. 1969) work plays with shifting perceptions of time, and his focus on art history becomes a strategy to avoid his own authorship. For this exhibition, Caulfield has imagined an installation of projections by Bruce Nauman (b. 1941) in the same space as the Spanish painter Francisco de Zurbarán's (1598 – 1664) *Saint Luke as a Painter before Christ on the Cross*, 1660. Caulfield's second work in the show is an innovative 3D sculpture-animation-painting that reimagines the Barcaccia Fountain in Rome, also accompanied by scale models in various materials. Completed in 1627-29 by the master of Baroque sculpture, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the Barcaccia Fountain was originally designed to depict a drowned boat, referencing the flooding of the River Tiber in 1598. The contemporary parallels with the European refugee crisis add a layer of poignancy to the works, in addition to the accretions of authorship already at play. In the slippage between the digital and the handmade, as 3D prints are turned into alabaster models, Caulfield takes on the aesthetic predispositions and expectations of the viewer.

Gordon Cheung (b. 1975) is a contemporary artist whose work captures the mood of the global collapse of civilization where moral, economic, and environmental crises have spun out of control. Spiritual undertones are balanced alongside familiar contemporary images including sources from popular media, cyberspace, nature, graffiti, kitsch, and historical painting. The New Order series use photos of Dutch Golden Age Still life paintings from the Rijksmuseum glitched by an open source code. The glitch is a code that re-arranges the pixels of the image into a digital sands of time effect to suggest the transition from one era to the digital age. The Dutch Golden Age is a period over 370 years ago from which the first economic bubble was recorded over the speculation of tulip bulbs. At its peak bulbs sold for the price of a house before collapsing. The Still Life genre is nowadays considered benign but beyond its virtuous Romantic language of being about the futility of materiality and the fragility of mortality against a background of puritanism it was also an ideological laundering of the loot of Empire expressing power, status and wealth.

The two works by **Stephane Graff** (b. 1965) in this exhibition belong to his *A Catalogue of Errors* series, an ongoing cycle of works begun in 2010, and are comprised of diptych panels that fuse text and painting. Making reference to typical auction catalogue double-page spreads that feature a work of art to one side and its accompanying description on the other, the silkscreen pieces are not, however, simple appropriations. Graff presents two individual artists' imaginary lots within the same painting, questioning the auction's role in imposing a standardized system upon artistic value. Graff's careful selections demonstrate how these texts, while meant to improve our appreciation of a piece, might very well describe any other work of art. In *Untitled (Prince/Degas)*, the title of the Richard Prince work described in the text, *Girlfriend*, could also describe the woman of Degas's sculpture – the artist's humorous allusions lead us to a new, and entirely disorienting view of masterpieces.

Henry Hudson's (b. 1982) series *The Rise and Fall of Young Sen* is a contemporary reimagining of William Hogarth's (1697 – 1764) satirical masterpiece, *A Rake's Progress*, 1733 – a cycle of works that chart the rise and fall of Tom Rakewell, from youth and wealth to vice, depravity and death – made entirely out of plasticine. *The Rise and Fall of Young Sen* transports Hogarth's cautionary moral tale to contemporary London; its eponymous hero, Young Sen, is a Chinese science prodigy who comes to read medicine at King's College. First exhibited at Sotheby's S12 Gallery in 2015, the work in this exhibition is a study in pen on paper for the 7th plate in the series of ten large-scale works, presented alongside three preparatory studies in plasticine. The vivid materiality of the plasticine references the heavy impasto paintwork of modern masters such as Leon Kossoff, Frank Auerbach, and Van Gogh. Like Hogarth, Hudson's scenes are replete with complex and dense iconography: Hogarth's social commentary is here updated, with a sense of wit and humour, playfulness and parody that is wholly in the spirit of the original.

Nick Hornby (b. 1980) and **Sinta Tantra's** (b. 1979) sculptures emerge from the convergence of a postmodern perspective and cutting-edge digital technology. As in *I never wanted to lean more heavily on a man than a bird in Chinese Blue*, *Hague Blue*, *Cornforth*, *Telemagenta* and *Incarnadine*, 2015, the artists use computer software to digitally model and then combine silhouettes sourced from art history, to create three-dimensional works that, as the viewer moves around them, reveal the shifting aspects of their source material – Brancusi, Rodin and Moore. Their use of traditional materials like bronze and marble highlights the artistic skill behind the works that, while maintaining the look of a computer-generated model, are nevertheless handcrafted. Hornby's initial idea for the work *Muse: Experiments in Colour*, 2015, was sparked by a visit to London's Victoria and Albert Museum, with its extensive collection of plaster casts that range from Trajan's column to Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces. Both of the works invoke the tradition of plaster cast modelling only to warp its expectations.

Wolfe von Lenkiewicz (b. 1966), is a British artist who studied Philosophy at York University, creates immaculately rendered compositions that mine familiar visual idioms from art history, creating ambiguous compositions that carefully examine what constitutes an original work of art. He is known for the reconfigurations of well-known images from art history and popular visual culture that question art historical discourses. Lenkiewicz's 'post-historic' practice deconstructs the linearity of historical perspective to challenge our notions of past and present and delineate a new space that lies outside of history. Rather than relegating a painting to a time period, recent paintings by von Lenkiewicz can be viewed more accurately as a form of hybrid, a fulcrum between ages. The work in this exhibition 'borrows' from Jacques-Louis David's (1748 – 1825) icon of the French Revolution, *The Death of Marat*, 1793, held in the collection at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium, and Gerhard Richter's *Wolken*, or cloud paintings, whose vaporescent forms create delicate *sfumato* brushwork around the figure of Marat. The painting hovers between past and present, engaging with both traditional craftsmanship and the readymade through the strategy of appropriation.

Mariele Neudecker (b. 1965) is best known for her vitrine works that contain sculptural landscapes of forests, lakes, or mountains, and chemically simulated weather effects. Her practice investigates historical representations of nature and landscape, particularly within Northern European Romanticism and the aesthetic philosophy of the Sublime, and our contemporary perception, imagination and memory of experience. Neudecker's vitrines both collapse and heighten our lived experience of landscape into diminutive three-dimensional form. In *Gravity Prevents the Atmosphere from Drifting into Outer Space*, 2001, Neudecker builds a landscape scene – as if a painting – that is bound within an aquarium-like vitrine and surrounded by atmospheric mists created through carefully measured chemical reactions. The genesis of all these 'Tank Works', as the artist calls them, is source material found in landscape painting; here Neudecker particularly imparts the sublime sense of wonder found in the canvases of the German Romantic painter, Caspar David Friedrich (1774 – 1840).

Gavin Turk (b. 1967) first came to prominence as a key member of the much-mythologised Young British Artists of the early 1990s, and his oeuvre consistently deals with issues of authenticity, identity, the 'myth' of the artist, and the authorship of a work of art. Presented for the first time in the UK, *Large Transit Disaster (Blue, Copper & Ochre)*, 2013, is a seminal example of Turk's ongoing *Transit Disaster* series. Appropriations of appropriations, Turk takes on the iconography of Andy Warhol's infamous *Death and Disasters* series, 1962-63, the imagery for which the Pop master took from newspaper photographs of fatal car accidents. Where Warhol's repetitions of the images blunted their tragedy, Turk takes inspiration from the 1960s silkscreens to comment on contemporary British society. Rather than an American car, Turk uses the icon of the white transit van, a symbol of a disappearing era of working class Britain. The expressive shapes of the van's distorted metal also allude to the underlying social tensions that led to the 2011 London riots. In recasting an iconic work from the annals of art history, Turk emphasises the power of artists to transform materials and question the uniqueness of creativity.

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Notes to editors:

Catherine Loewe:

Catherine Loewe is a London-based curator and consultant. Following a degree in Art History she began her career at auctioneers Christie's and has worked for leading London galleries Waddington Galleries, The Marlborough Gallery and Anthony d'Offay Gallery, and with international publishers Flash Art, Louise Blouin Media and Ocula. In 2008, Loewe Contemporary was established as a curatorial platform supporting the careers of emerging artists. The company works in an advisory capacity for private, corporate and public collections.

Becca Pelly-Fry, Head Curator, Griffin Gallery:

Becca Pelly-Fry took up post as Griffin Gallery Director in January 2013, and has since curated the majority of the exhibitions at the gallery. Becca originally trained as a sculptor at Northumbria University and began her career at The Biscuit Factory Gallery in Newcastle, becoming gallery manager and curator. Becca worked for three years as Arts Development Officer at Kensington & Chelsea Council and a similar role at Camden Council. Becca is Head Curator for ColArt International, with responsibility for Directorship of Griffin Gallery and The Fine Art Collective global education programme, and advising the global Winsor & Newton and Liquitex teams on working with artists.

