

THE FIGURE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

21 APRIL 2017 3 JUNE 2017

PRIVATE VIEW
TUESDAY 20TH APRIL 2017
6:30 - 8:45PM

37 RATHBONE STREET
W1T 1NZ LONDON

TEODORA AXENTE
HUMA BHABHA
LYNETTE YIADOM-BOAKYE
LU CHAO
NDIDI EMEFELE
TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK
LEON KOSSOFF
CESARE LUCCHINI
KERRY JAMES MARSHALL
ROBERT MUNTEAN
WANGECHI MUTU
ZAK OVÉ
NEO RAUCH
NICOLA SAMORÌ
GIRJESH KUMAR SINGH
RUOZHE XUE



Huma Bhabha, Untitled, 2010, cork, wood, and acrylic paint

rosenfeldporcini's first themed exhibition in 2017 contemplates the possibilities of the figure in the post Picasso era after the great Spanish artist had seemingly exhausted any avenues of looking at the human figure. For the occasion, a group of loans from prominent collections interact with a selection of new works by gallery artists.

If Duchamp threw open the doors of what could be defined as a work of art, the formal frontiers of the human figure were torn down by Picasso. The visual innovation brought about by his deconstruction of human physiognomy into geometric planes still resonates in the practice of many contemporary figurative artists. Over the course of a decade, the prevailing Neo Classical portraiture aesthetic initiated by Picasso in the 20's, was then rendered obsolete by the same artist's distortion of the human figure which reached its apotheosis with 'Guernica'.

Historically the Western tradition until the 17th century associated the portrayal of the human being with a figure of power, whether religious, political or financial. There was no democracy to the process. Even the black Moors who featured in many Venetian paintings in the 16th century would only provide further aesthetic options to the artist, without any ideological implications. Similarly, the attention which began to be paid to the more desperate inhabitants of society such as beggars, young homeless boys and flower sellers during the 17th century also had no political subtext.

It wasn't until Daumier's caricatural sculptures in the 19th century that the portrayal of a human being carried connotations beyond the psychological. In fact, the acute critique of the establishment resounding in the French master's large body of work helped to forge the use of political statement in artistic production. The Figure in Contemporary Art, without in any way claiming to be exhaustive, attempts to explore the various sources of inspiration that are influencing artists today.

Throughout history, artists have mostly adopted precedent paradigms as inspiration. A number of works in the show serve as an example of this incessant dialogue.

Leon Kossoff's heavily expressionistic chalk and pastel on paper (*From Cezanne: The Temptation of St. Anthony*) is an evocative variation of Cezanne's masterpiece.

With *Still*, **Nicola Samorí** recaptures the canons of Italian 17th Century Baroque further documenting the artist's reinvention of art history. For this large scale work Samorí used a composite technique - oil painted monotypes are laid on assembled papers on canvas uniformed by a coat of tempera.



Lisa by **Teodora Axente**, who hails from the much acclaimed Cluj School in Romania, illustrates the artist's practice which combines references of 17th century Dutch figure painting with a strong sense of religious spiritualism. **Cesare Lucchini's** rich painterly works have emerged out of abstract expressionism where the process of painting is all. However, his canvasses are rooted in the human drama and the suffering figures in *Dove vanno* relate to the difficulties of negotiating a path through life. *Sound world* by Austrian artist **Robert Muntean** interprets Cubism in a new light. Although deconstructed, the figures still serve as an anchor around which the whole composition is built up. Inspired by traditional Chinese ink painting, **Lu Chao's** *Babel* fits entirely into the 'humanistic' Western tradition, in as much as the artist's narrative is concerned with the interaction between human being and unseen sources of power. Traditional aesthetics are also at the core of **Ruozhe Xue's** practice which straddles the thin line between realism and dreamlike, surreal imagery. In *Untitled*, the missing context eludes any plausible attempt to unravel the enigma around the human figure. The enigmatic *Bauer* by **Neo Rauch** is populated by characters belonging to the artist individual iconographic vocabulary, one that suggests a reinvention of traditional history painting as it evades precise meaning opening up the work to individual interpretation.

In recent years portraiture has begun to feature subjects who were previously totally marginalized. Among the artists who paved the way of the democratization, **Kerry James Marshall** more than anyone else felt compelled to redress the total absence of black subjects from the tradition of Western Art. *Untitled (Self-Portrait) Supermodel*, like his whole body of work, takes on classical portraiture but reverses history.

The same enormous imbalance in the Western tradition of portraiture which almost exclusively represents white people is overturned by London-based artist **Lynette Yiadom-Boakye**. *The Quartz* releases a sense of ambiguity, sharpened by the spatial-temporal anonymity typical of Boakye's figures.

In *Vegan Salad*, **Trenton Doyle Hancock**, a prominent figure of the current re-discovery of African-American culture, conceives an intricate storyline drawing on the world of comics and graphic novels.

Through the interplay of ink and collage of *In Killing Fields Sweet Butterfly Ascend* the multidisciplinary Kenyan artist **Wangechi Mutu** reimagines the 'African experience' questioning the conventions about femininity and the predominant cultural conditioning. *Rainbowcation* by Nigerian artist **Ndidi Emefiele** is a fine example of her self-sufficient and self-assertive female inhabited universe which implies an acute critique on the male dominated African society. If *La Jablesse* by **Zak Ové** reaches out to threatened cultures, highlighting the soul of African and Trinidadian identities and referencing the Carnival in Trinidad as a homage to his father's heritage, Pakistani artist **Huma Bhabha's** dramatic *Untitled*, assembled out of cork and wood, emanates a totemic aura that speaks of colonialism and geographical displacement and memory.

Indian artist **Girjesh Kumar Singh's** *Laaga Chunari mein daag (Look at you)* assembles a compendium of human faces sculpted out of broken bricks from destroyed buildings, incorporating an elegy to the impermanence of the idea of home and an inevitable metaphor for the tragedy of today's mass migration. This installation provides a lasting testimony to the timeless fascination and inspiration behind the portrayal of the human figure.