

MAI 36 GALERIE

MAGNUS PLESSSEN *nineteen hundred fourteen*

Opening: Friday, 6 November 2015, 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Exhibition: 7 November 2015 - 9 January 2016
Hours: Tues-Fri 11 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., Sat 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

A hundred years ago, Europe was engulfed in the second year of what was then known as the „great“ war. It was led by politicians, rulers and military commanders of every stripe who were utterly out of their depth and in charge of a war machine whose brutality and ruthlessness already far outstripped their own outmoded ways of thinking. The war was the result of what might be described as an insatiable build-up of thirst for power on all sides that had needed only one small spark to light the fuse. And once that fuse was lit, the war dragged on for four interminable years, costing the lives of some 20 million individuals, leaving further countless millions wounded or disabled, and completely changing the face of Europe. In art, the sense of horror was often echoed in grotesque imagery, for the almost unbearable reality of the wounds needed some outlet that could indict and expose the background and causes of such violence.

Magnus Plessen (*1967 in Hamburg, lives and works in Berlin) has recently engaged with the topic of this devastation and its victims – a topic that has, until now, and quite probably for the foreseeable future, unfortunately been relegated to the realms of anthropology. Starting in 2014, and continuing until 2018, Plessen has placed his focus on creating images that draw visual attention to facial and bodily disfiguration.

Some time ago, Plessen stumbled across photographic documentation of the first world war and its aftermath. The photographs he found had originally been intended for medical purposes. He used these, together with illustrations of facial prosthetics, as his starting point. Immobile and expressionless as they were, the mask-like facial prosthetics were meant to allow the wearer, at least in some small measure, the confidence to be seen once more in public.

It is difficult even to look at these images portraying the brutal facts of such mutilation. Magnus Plessen, in his painting, transposes and translates them through the medium of art in a way that renders the humanity behind them visible once more, directing the gaze to the circumstances and thus allowing room for critique. He eschews all attempts at sarcasm or grotesquerie.

His distinctive way of deploying line and plane, developed over many years, with an effect more redolent of drawing than traditional painting, allows him to evoke or even explicitly depict spaces and emptiness in ways that invite viewers to engage with the subject matter and come to their own conclusions. Through his use of colour and collage-like hard contrasts in both line and plane, Magnus Plessen feeds the active gaze with aesthetic, abstract information that actually heightens the recognisably figurative aspect of the images. The face as the bearer of identity and emotion, and in its capacity to make the individual recognisable among his or her peers, is what has made portraiture the foremost genre in painting down the centuries. Magnus Plessen portrays the individual within a wide and overarching context, subject to the potentially destructive forces of technological and mechanical violence, to which anyone, anywhere, may still fall victim in our times. Both the pictorial space and the space of the individual are brought into a wider social and political context in Plessen's paintings.

Magnus Plessen intends to exhibit the paintings he has been creating since 2014, and which he will continue to create until 2018, in every major country that was involved the first world war, in various specific constellations and presentational forms. In 2014, the exhibition *1914: Magnus Plessen* was shown at the Rose Art Museum in Waltham, Massachusetts, USA. Prior to that, Plessen had solo exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, PS1 in New York, K21 in Düsseldorf and the Art Institute of Chicago. Mai36 gallery has been hosting the work of Magnus Plessen in solo and group exhibitions since 2003.

The exhibition opening will take place on Friday, 6 November from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Magnus Plessen will be in attendance. Visual material is available on request (office@mai36.com).

We look forward to welcoming you at the gallery and thank you for your interest.

Mai 36 Galerie
Victor Gisler

October 2015