BAERT GALLERY

PRESLAV   KOSTOV   FROM THE CLOUD
MARC   PRATS
LÁSZLÓ   VON DOHNÁNYI

JULY 8   AUGUST 26
                2023

Baert Gallery is pleased to present *From the Cloud*, a group exhibition of new paintings from three London-based artists, László von Dohnányi, Marc Prats and Preslav Kostov on view from 8 July to 26 August 2023. For the gallery's third collaboration with curator Louis Blanc-Francard, the artists in this exhibition adopt the meteorological and digital definitions of 'the cloud' to conceive environments where post-digital beings can roam, allowing their liminal narratives to unfold.

Despite their ambiguity, clouds are not weightless; the average fair-weather cloud weighs at least a million pounds. When considering the etymology of the word, which finds its roots in the Old English term 'clud', a 'rock mass' or a 'hill', this comes as no surprise. As much as clouds are the hills of the heavens, 'the cloud' in its metaphorical/data sense, forms the landscape of the modern internet - a human Olympus of sorts. Neither lauding nor wholly lamenting this immersive state of technology, the works on show present us with alternative post-apocalyptic scenarios, teasing through the authority of isolation, fascination and evolution that exists within the cloud.

László von Dohnányi's labyrinthine oil paintings on linen tread the line between mechanical construction and organic growth. Although the subjects of his paintings take cue from the natural world, ¬by introducing characteristics of computer-generated images such as hypermediated interfaces, ultra-sharp edges and aesthetic over stimulation, the paintings take on an uncanny quality. Branches whet into thorny wires and apples glint with synthetic sheen in a crude biomimicry of nature.

At the centre of this is the idea of remediation: the notion that new media transforms and refashions it's antecedent forms. Von Dohnányi explores the reciprocal influence between digital aesthetics and traditional painting through a unique process of creation. He first begins in the digital format; sourcing virtual 3D models from the internet and using architectural modelling software to distil the data down to forms and shapes that resonate with him. He then relies on a collage like 'cut and paste' method that recalls the truly flat 2D surfaces of online imagery simultaneously departing and honouring the three-dimensional layering of paint in traditional art. In this sense, von Dohnányi decelerates the expeditious quality of cyberspace through manual composition.

Paintings by Marc Prats turn our focus to the anthropoid consequences of social media dependency. Having been born just before the turn of the century – in a world yet to engulf itself in the fever of the Third Industrial Revolution – Prats addresses the nostalgic sensibilities of his generation. Perhaps it is the knowing longing for the analogue that makes humans more susceptible to psychological brutality associated with prolonged screen use? Prats critiques the alluring and addictive facets of internet culture by subverting their mechanisms from within. Projecting the remote and fragmented language of social media directly onto the canvas, in the act of painting, he wills into existence surreal visual cacophonies. The painting 'Prisms of Compromise' for example, plays with the textures of spray paint and glitter impasto to subvert the dark undertones of our digital reality. That in feeding 'the cloud' with personal data we are constantly bargaining with algorithms, compromising with powers often beyond our comprehension.

The presence of technology takes on a more elusive form in the five paintings by Preslav Kostov featured in *From the Cloud*. Employing the technique of automatism, Kostov's paintings emerge from a cumulative process of self-questioning. The artist engages with the practice of pareidolia, rendering human forms within nimbus billows to engage with the subconscious and somewhat formulaic patterns of digital media consumption. Untethered from any singular narrative, time period or experience, his ravelled apparitions inhabit a realm absent of worldly possessions or cultural signifies. This veil of ambiguity stimulates interpretation of the human condition in isolation.

Kostov's imposing compositions dialog with the form and palette of the Old Master painters, presenting imagined scenes of personal struggle situated within a liminal space. The large scale triptych 'Dance of the Lilies' with their gestural sense of movement is resonant of the Elgin Marbles and finds roots in the psychological tropes of temptation, worry and regret. Without attributing the confinements of place and time to his works, in exhibiting alongside Von Dohnányi and Prats, the paintings appear to grapple with the idea of autonomy and the attempt to credit meaning to what we do within the digital sphere.

László von Dohnányi was born in Hamburg, Germany and resides and works in London. He received a BFA from the Ruskin School of Art at the University of Oxford in 2012, a BSc in Architecture from University College London in 2015 and an MA Painting from the Royal College of Art in 2021. László has exhibited in London, Hamburg, Berlin, Budapest, Miami and New York City. His most recent solo show was Divining Network at Long Story Short Gallery, New York City in 2023.

Marc Prats is a London-based artist born in Barcelona. Last year he completed an MA in Painting at The Royal College of Art in London and previously received his BA in Liberal Arts and Sciences from Utrecht University in 2016. Marc has exhibited internationally, including the show Life in Colour at Hew Hood Gallery, London. In 2019 he was shortlisted for the Signature Art Prize and two years later he won the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant.

Preslav Kostov is a Bulgarian born painter who moved to London when he was ten years old. He commenced his education with a foundation course at The Royal Drawing School before undertaking a BA in Illustration at Leeds College of Art. He is due to graduate from his MA in painting at The Royal College of Art this summer. Preslav has mostly exhibition in London and was recently part of Studio West Gallery's group show Skin Deep. He was a recipient of The Elizabeth Greenshields Award in both 2021 and 2023.