

Man, Myth and the Machine: Zsolt Bodoni, Robert Fry, Cantemir Hausi and Vitaly Pushnitsky

Curated by Jane Neal

Erika Deak Gallery, Budapest, 20 October- 26 November 2011

Erika Deak Gallery is delighted to present *Man, Myth and the Machine*, an exhibition looking at Man's relationship with mythology and machinery featuring four international artists: **Zsolt Bodoni (HU), Robert Fry (UK), Cantemir Hausi (RO) and Vitaly Pushnitsky (RU)**. Curated by Jane Neal (described by ARTINFO as: 'a leading expert on Eastern European Contemporary Art'), the show will present new works by the participating artists, increasingly recognised as being among the most dynamic and intriguing painters active today.

All the artists make work that is concerned with either man's relationship to mythology, or machinery; or an amalgamation of the two. Since the beginning, man's journey through life and time has seen him turn to mythology for inspiration or even comfort: earthly trials and tribulations diminished in the face of Herculean feats or battles against beings of supernatural size and power. The machine has been both an inspiration and tool for good, but often used for ill. As much as men have sought progress and modernisation, they have also chosen to use the machine to strike down destruction and pain on their enemies.

Zsolt Bodoni's new paintings make no apologies for the reinvestigation of age old subject matter: most notably the mythologies surrounding the female nude and the equestrian statue and the use of these images by those in power to reinforce their status and propaganda. With their roots in antiquity and re-births throughout art history, it might be imagined that these symbols of love, beauty and power have completed their cycles of reincarnation. Not so. Of late Bodoni has furthered his interest in 'recycling' by re-working key works from art history amidst the engines of war to strange and powerful effect. Cavernous rooms are strewn with machines, war horses in gas masks, workers and half finished assemblages; all this while playing host to seemingly oblivious languid nudes and wild animals.

Robert Fry's practice has been described as 'a refreshing interpretation of figurative painting'. High in tension, his stark representations of the human form are silhouetted in profile against dense, abstract grounds. There is no real suggestion of where the figure is actually located, yet it is clear the depicted form is being confronted by an intense situation- either through the presence of other figures, through the gaze of the viewer, or even by the artist himself. At times words run along the bottom of the canvas, permitting the viewer insights into the relationship between artist and subject and the frustrations of forging a painting. Recently, Fry has reduced some of his figures to an 'essence' of form, but one that remains undeniably human. He continues along the theme of sexuality but the anthropomorphic elements that connect figure with mythical beast, charge the dialogue, suggesting dark and disquieting qualities.

Cantemir Hausi's mystical works nearly always involve nature. However his tender, visionary depictions of animals and the landscape of his childhood are never sentimental. Instead, an atmosphere of uncertainty and unease pervades his paintings. There is a sense that Hausi's subjects are being watched, perhaps surveyed; a feeling that continues to haunt the artist as a result of witnessing the harassment of his dissident father under Ceausescu's rule. Long shadows are a common motif among

Hausi's paintings. They can be interpreted as a physical manifestation of the artist's memories of beauty marred by dark foreboding. Symbolic beasts are also a constant. For Hausi, animals represent something very special, almost magical in nature. Unlike humans they are not open to corruption or lies and thus represent pure versions of qualities humans strive for, such as strength, loyalty and peace.

Vitaly Pushnitsky works across several mediums, often juxtaposing paintings with sculptures. On this occasion the artist has chosen to produce paintings that address two of the most iconic and practical 'sculptures' of history: a Corinthian capital, and the wheel; here represented by a tyre. By choosing these objects that have become so fundamental to the lives of humans across time, Pushnitsky has arrived at the essence of man's relationship with the machine. The capital enables the column to support a roof, and the wheel a cart, or eventually a car. Pushnitsky's treatment of these subjects in a painterly style reminiscent of the High Renaissance with a tondo format and celestial grounds of fluffy white clouds, is typical of his practice. His works are deeply conceptual and his persistent use of light-filled negative space lends them a photographic quality. However, their scale and format is loyal to painterly tradition and to the brush - one of man's first tools .