

MARCIN MACIEJOWSKI

PRIVATE VIEW

LONDON ELY HOUSE

28 Nov 2019 - 25 Jan 2020



Marcin Maciejowski's first London exhibition with the gallery will illuminate the Polish artist's continued exploration of his immediate surrounds, including scenes from the art world, fragments from art history and the often-overlooked moments that permeate urban culture and daily life. *Private View* features new large-scale paintings and graphic works on paper that uniquely merge a comic-book aesthetic with Old Master traditions to present an intimate, enigmatic form of contemporary social commentary. Minor personal concerns are mixed with universal political themes, and Maciejowski often equates political rhetoric with the platitudes of an art critic. He draws from a range of influences and inspirations – literature and poetry, the art historical canon and the work of friends, scenes both real and imagined, convivial and anecdotal, personal and political – consistently executed with a meticulous attention to detail and an acute sensitivity to aesthetics.

Populated by imagery sourced from photographs, movies, posters and newspaper illustrations, some of Maciejowski's works feature speech or thought bubbles offering ambiguous musings on culture that nod to the universality of these isolated moments. Contemporary societies absorb a wealth of visual information every day, oscillating between the ordinary and the beautiful. Visual prompts and materials become a catalyst for curiosity, while curiosity forms a fundamental component of the creative act.

The privilege of the artist is to transform this information – the visual infinitives and embarrassing beauties – into personal works of art. With capitalised letters that take on the appearance of propaganda, in style if not in substance, Maciejowski's paintings simultaneously hint at the collective histories that inform their past: a satirical, yet sensitive take on the quotidian world. Elsewhere, the artist invests his works with narrative through evocative titles, such as the bird's-eye view of two pairs of feet called *Are you going to paint today* (2019), hinting at the context beyond the painted scene.

Referencing not only social histories but motifs from art history, *Private View* includes a number of works drawing on both traditional and contemporary art. A series of small-scale canvases re-present Gustav Klimt's drawings of Friederike Maria Beer (1916) at their original scale, accompanied by an index that demonstrates the variations in tone and mood of the individual sketches. Large-scale paintings present a *mise-en-abyme*, a scene within a scene, in which a viewer is shown engaging with works of art, drawing attention to the act of looking. These scenes include the inaugural exhibition held at Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac London's Ely House in 2017, Jakob Troschel's 17th century *Portrait of Queen Constance of Austria* in the Polish castle Pieskowa Skala and a portrait by the Polish painter Witkacy (1885-1939).

I find satisfaction in painting views of works by other artists, including my artist-friends – this is my way of insightful art viewing. This is also my way of having these works for a moment, just for myself. – Marcin Maciejowski, 2019

I was fascinated by the repetition, which takes on a rhythm. This is also the source of my fascination with face types – each painter paints them differently, everyone creates their own vision of the oval of a woman's face. I analysed Klimt's by repetition and painted nine of his drawings of Friederike Maria Beer. What is important here is how the face is drawing, using just a few lines. The index painting has only the backgrounds – the paper of these drawings, reflecting their authentic colours. – Marcin Maciejowski, 2019

In his characteristic technique of simplification and reduction, Maciejowski combines a sometimes brash, comic-strip effect with a meticulous realism that is reminiscent of the Old Masters. In the early 16th century, the writer Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529) established the term *sprezzatura* to describe the ability to carry out arduous tasks without apparent effort. Art historian Werner Busch once used the term in a lecture he gave in Berlin, to characterise the courtly ease of Rembrandt's late work. It is precisely this ease, this elegance, that represents the ideal to which Maciejowski aspires.

Born in Babice, Poland in 1974, and a founder of the Grupa Ładnie (Pretty Group) alongside Rafał Bujnowski, Marek Firek, Wilhelm Sasnal and Josef Tomczyk, Maciejowski's works transform the fleeting into the timeless, portraying a world both personal and anecdotal by honing in on minutiae in a form of realism that evades explicit narrative. The scenes he presents inherit the social and political essence of their source material, while offering an interrogation of the role of contemporary painting today.

Formed in the late 20th century in opposition to the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków, the Grupa Ładnie takes its name from professors' remarks that students' works were 'nicely done' or 'pretty'. Showing at counterculture clubs and venues, the Grupa Ładnie organised ironic and absurd shows featuring paintings, films, musical performances and satirical prize-giving ceremonies. Referencing elements of neo-Dadaism, the group's paintings were characterised by kitsch and pastiche, utilising found imagery and accessible modes of display. While his early practice responded to the shifting realities of 1990s Poland, Maciejowski's recent works employ similar tools and mechanisms to investigate the new structures prevalent across capitalist societies and culture today.

Maciejowski's painted reproductions confront and surprise the viewer, moving beyond pure, representative realism to evoke a sense of disruption and fragmentation: a visitor's head in front of the painted subject or an event occurring just beyond the frame. Introducing slanting perspectives and unexpected crops, Maciejowski creates tension between the directness of his representation and the viewer's experience of each work, alluding to the tensions between forms of painted or photographic representation, whereby the image's power to reveal or conceal simultaneously merges and collides.

Executed in charcoal and drawing upon his technical skill as an illustrator, the works on paper on display demonstrate Maciejowski's unique awareness of tone and form, while the sensitive paring down or flattening of his subjects attests to his deft penmanship and echoes the gestural brushstrokes of the larger, painted works. Depicting moments from daily life, Maciejowski's drawings imbue the mundane with significance and distil potency in their emptiness.

Maciejowski's work is represented in distinguished public collections, including the Belvedere, Vienna; Volpinum Kunstsammlung, Vienna; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary Foundation, Vienna; Museum der Moderne, Salzburg; MOCAP Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow; Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw; SCHAUWERK Sindelfingen, and Burger Collection, Berlin. The National Museum in Krakow held a comprehensive solo exhibition of Maciejowski's work in 2010, followed by solo shows at Ostdeutsche Galerie, Regensburg the same year and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead in 2013.