

## MARC BRANDENBURG

### SNOWFLAKE

PARIS MARAIS

27 Jun 2020 - 29 Aug 2020



In the context of global protest movements, notably Fridays For Future and Black Lives Matter, Marc Brandenburg's exhibition *Snowflake* addresses political and relational issues such as gender and ethnic differences, while embracing the urgent need for a radical change. Through his most recent series of drawings, he explores the conditions of life at the fringes of society.

*The topics I'm dealing with now, I've been dealing with for the last 30 years. It might seem like the zeitgeist but shit has just been going backwards for way too long. That's all. Enough!* – Marc Brandenburg

The German and Afro-American artist has devoted himself to precisely those conditions that are increasingly becoming the object of hate and ridicule in our society, especially in the context of the events of recent months: the sensitive, the endangered, the traumatised, the lack of resistance, and the idea that every person is unique, regardless of their social status, gender or ethnic background.

Scenes from a protest march are presented alongside smaller images of faceless figures – masked, with heads bowed or fully covered. They are severed from their surroundings and appear cocooned or in free-fall amidst an expanse of undefined space. Marc Brandenburg's figures and shapes reveal the fragility and potential homelessness of the human condition, which resonate particularly in the period of the health, social and economic global crises we are facing today.

With an oeuvre that encompasses drawing, photography, performance and installation, Marc Brandenburg's unique pencil drawings and his innovative modes of immersive display form a distinctive and acclaimed element of his practice. Inverting light and dark values, the resulting images radically expand the possibilities of drawing and function as springboards into strange parallel world(s), reduced to their fundamentals and freed from explicit social or political narrative.

Born in 1965 in Berlin, where he now lives and works, Marc Brandenburg grew up in Texas and Germany. Self-taught, he draws from a range of sources, including film, literature, urban cultures of the mid-twentieth century, activism and social segregation to consider themes of nonconformity, performance, difference and isolation. Taking long walks through the cities of Berlin and Barcelona, the artist photographs the people, groups and scenes he encounters, which he then isolates from their surroundings and develops inverted, transposing black for white, before completing his pencil reproductions with meticulous attention to detail and form.

*Marc Brandenburg's negative-reversed black-and-white drawings thematise the vision of a broken, violent society in which people are increasingly socially isolated, suffering mental illness and addiction.* – Oliver Koerner von Gustorf (writer & journalist), 2020

Through images of roles and bodies, of costumes and rituals, of elements outside the social norm, the artist explores a sense of transience and temporality. Depicting drug users, street performers and improvised shakedowns (or acts of bribery and extortion) as isolated and suspended moments, Brandenburg's drawings freeze otherwise fleeting scenes in a state of permanence. Referencing Chuck Palahniuk's 1996 novel *Fight Club* in the exhibition's title, *Snowflake* evokes the topics he addresses – the white of the paper, the idea of drawing as crystallisation and the act of arresting time – and is embodied in the practices of representation and display that inform the exhibition. It alludes to the word's use in increasingly divided societies as a metaphorical insult, employed by and aimed at varying political, social and generational groups since it was first coined by Palahniuk over 50 years ago.

Coalescing the motif of the snowflake with his subject matter, the artist invites visitors to consider the experience of homelessness, understood both

literally and as the absence of self or the loss of control – a 'mythic' homelessness. As with the development of the term 'snowflake' – its descriptive function and ever-changing social construct – Brandenburg's figures are presented not as individual identities, but as signifiers of socially constructed groupings. Lacking backgrounds, features or facial expressions, they become objects awaiting imposed identities and narratives. Their anonymous status as empty signifiers calls into question broader considerations of both embedded stereotyping and its inherent subjectivity.

*Only the form, the surface remains, at once material and psychological, often stretched or distorted ... Marc Brandenburg's pictures subtly examine the ways in which bodies move in urban public space, posing questions about power, class and territory ... in their poetic radicality, these pictures are embedded in a long subversive tradition ... They insistently embody that very sensibility which causes every snowflake-hater to cringe. – Oliver Koerner von Gustorf, 2020*