

PAINTING THE FIGURE



Teodora Axente, *Divided objects*, 2019

Painting the Figure

4 march - 24 april 2021

Following on from the exhibition 'The Figure in Contemporary Art' in 2017, Gallery Rosenfeld is opening 'Painting the Figure' which will feature works by nine artists hailing from nine different countries. Each artist has, for very different reasons, made the figure the major protagonist in their works.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, it was possible to visit art Biennales or Documentas where, in the throes of the mania for all things conceptual, painting, especially figurative, had all but disappeared. Painting in general was considered an antiquated means of expression and no longer of any relevance. As the art world began to look at areas of the world which had been overlooked by the western canon, such as Chinese and now African painting, painting the figure started re-gaining importance so much so that today figurative painting is the prominent form of artistic expression.

The history of western art revolves around the drama of the human condition. Portraying the figure in a variety of guises has been a continuum throughout the centuries and artists have continually found new ways of looking at the figure and thereby talking about the human drama. All of the nine painters included in the exhibition have found a particular way to paint the figure without falling back on typically 'realistic' tropes.

Drawing inspiration from science fiction, the Spanish artist José Castiella places his strange, surreal figures in a post-apocalyptic landscape, presenting a totally new, magnificently realised, world view. Beshar Koushaji breaks up our vision of his figures and arranges them in an apparently perfect world referencing his idyllic memories of a Syria he once knew but which, tragically, no longer exists. The tiny figures which populate the works of the Chinese artist Lu Chao are placed into a dramatic and uncertain world where they try to balance on wires and continually risk falling into the abyss. However, his remarkable prowess with black and white shows how much the artist is influenced by the Chinese ink masters of the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). The Iranian Shiva Ahmadi is inspired by the world of Persian miniatures yet she uses this tradition to make overtly political works which, whilst on an initial viewing appear ravishingly beautiful, on closer inspection seep with violence. These works are highly critical both of her homeland and, on a wider level, what human beings are capable of doing to each other. The Sudanese artist Mutaz Elemam, who now lives in Cairo, continually makes small portraits as a way of recalling his past life in Sudan and thereby making his memories concrete and fixing them in time.



José Castiella, An endless congress II, 2020

Teodora Axente's strange post psychoanalytical figures are placed in settings which are inspired by the Dutch masters of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Both the English painter Araminta Blue and the Italian Alfio Giurato are fascinated by the gamut of expressive possibilities which painting has to offer, yet they use the medium in completely different ways. Whereas the former uses paint very sparingly giving space the same importance as gesture thus enabling us to complete the works in our own heads, Giurato builds up layers and layers of oil paint often relying only on a 'spatula' to apply the material, thus blurring the figure and leaving us with a vision or impression.

The Nigerian artist Utthman Wahaab, uses his large scale drawings like a painter imbuing them with colour and creating totemic images which offer a critique of how large female bodies were considered a symbol of beauty in Nigeria until western influences and western fashions relegated this idea to the dustbin of history.

This current fascination with figuration has led to a widening of a world view where countries and even continents which were previously ignored have seen attention focused on them so that the art world itself now looks at artists from every corner of the globe. As a small contribution to this new widening of attention, we have selected nine artists from nine different countries.

featured artists:

- Shiva Ahmadi
- Teodora Axente
- Araminta Blue
- José Castiella
- Lu Chao
- Mutaz Elemam
- Alfio Giurato
- Besher Koushaji
- Uthman Wahaab