

GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA

PARIS - BRUSSELS

Pieter Schoolwerth

Shadows Past

16 April — 1 June 2013
Rue Charles Decoster 8 - Brussels 1050



Galerie Nathalie Obadia is delighted to present the first solo exhibition by Pieter Schoolwerth in Brussels, following *Portraits of Paintings* in Paris in 2010.

Pieter Schoolwerth was born in St Louis, Missouri in 1970 and graduated from the California Institute of Art. He lives and works in New York, where he has been exhibiting regularly since 1994. The artist has been involved in many group shows, including *Pop Surrealism* at the Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut in 1998; *Festival Polyphonix* at the Pompidou Centre in Paris in 2002; *Drawing Out Of The Void* at Vestry Arts, Inc. in New York in 2004; *Tomorrow Land: CalArts In Moving Picture* at MOMA, New York in 2006, and *Leave No Trace* at ISCP in New York in 2009.

The show is made up of recent works which, like the series *After Troy* at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York in November 2012, explore the fecundity of Pieter Schoolwerth's latest pictorial researches. The works on show in Brussels are the fruits of two other projects: *The Z-axis Cycle* and *Portraits of Paintings*, held respectively at Miguel Abreu Gallery in New York in 2009 and at Galerie Obadia in Paris in 2010. Taking a huge repertoire of images, ranging from the Renaissance to the 19th century, from mythological painting to still life, Pieter Schoolwerth revisits the art of the old masters by reference to a completely personal and original synthesis. Somewhere between the abstract and the figurative, tracing and compression, his paintings modify and redeploy the shapes from the past which they draw on for their inspiration, in order, as he puts it, «to address the contemporary world».

His technique is based upon tools which are no less up to date. The canvases from the *After Troy* project reveal Pieter Schoolwerth's latest developments in the visual arts. The artist starts from a reproduction of a painting, in this case one by Simon Vouet (1590-1649) or Lionello Spada (1576-1622), which he digitizes and blows up, choosing and reorganising certain parts first, to print on a canvas measuring more than 150 × 180 cm. Schoolwerth speaks of «mechanical pointillism¹» to describe the pixelated effect of the image obtained. He then partly covers it in matte black acrylic paint.

This «black overpaint», as he calls it, throws the remaining figurative parts, such as two superposed faces, an arm or a foot, into relief.

They form a new body which is pulverised and dismembered and is preparing to be slashed with thick pastels and coloured flat tints in a chromatic range aligned on that of the original image.

Pieter Schoolwerth describes this process, which comprises several rigorous stages, one that starts with a reproduction and ends up with a canvas, as underscoring *«the arc of his desire»*. Art critic John Yau emphasizes that within the severe constraints of his method he has ultimately found a way to permit improvisation. He explains that *“this is further heightened by the pristine state of the painting’s matte black surface, which suggests that no erasure or major alteration took place during the process, that premier coup painting and drawing into a set of discrete decisions in which revision isn’t allowed.”*

By contrast with the sharpness of the backgrounds, the path of certain brush strokes is particularly visible. Their movements can be tracked at a palpable pace which distorts faces in a way reminiscent of Francis Bacon or Frank Auerbach. On top of that, the difference in textures between the smooth ‘overpaint’ and the energetic brush strokes shows a disconnect that is not merely visual but also temporal between space and action. This pictorial syncopation generates the poetic ambiguity of the works conceived in the wake of *After Troy*, and in their own way they prolong the power of dreams and automatic writing so close to the surrealists’ hearts. The Aldrich Museum (Connecticut) had noted this affinity back in 1998 when it had associated Pieter Schoolwerth with a group of international artists under the banner of Pop Surrealism.

The important milestone in the other paintings shown at this new exhibition in the Nathalie Obadia Gallery lies in the series of subtle shifts of the entire painting as an object in the digital universe. In one of the paintings, for example, the work is framed by a white strip. A more attentive look reveals that this frame is made of square particles from the digital photo of the wall on which the painting hangs whilst being produced. The destabilising effect printed directly on the canvas, this extraction of the object from its substance through its digital reproduction, is added to the various abstract touches to the work in producing the paintings: tracing and slashing of bodies, superposition of heads, mixing photography and collage, design and print and abstract and gestural painting, itself a reductionist treatment of the figurative painting that underpins the image. It is therefore a sort of new figuration which endeavours first of all to capture the oblique yet objective abstraction effects that produce the body of today before giving it shape and substance again through what could still be called a painting. A second new, recognised element concerns the appearance of fragments of photographed contemporary figures that are introduced in the melee of the re-articulation of distant works by Vouet and Spada.

Thanks to cover-ups and distortions in each of his paintings, what remains of the memory of the bodies – a dismantled mass – floats in space reduced to a single dimension. In his own words, Schoolwerth is a practitioner of ‘reverse cubism’: *‘Picasso or Braque would paint a single person from several points of view, whereas I paint several people from a single point of view’*.

The contrast between the uniformity of the monochrome, smooth, flat «overpaint» and the modelled and coloured figures, is pushed to its limits in this new series. The general effect magnifies the brush strokes, vying with the wild energy of the post-war American masters of lyrical abstraction. Like the latter painters, Schoolwerth *«takes advantage of the resistance of the materials to affirm the tragic dimension of the gesture which comes again and again on the image where ceaseless conflicts are played out.»*² In this unexpected way, therefore, this 21st-century New York painter is boldly and successfully melding the painting of Caravaggio and Francis Bacon, identifying their shared points and transcending their genres.

In parallel with his painting, Pieter Schoolwerth ran the indie label Wierd Records, and until 27 February he was staging a weekly evening at Home Sweet Home on New York’s Lower East Side, featuring performances by international musicians and DJs. He loves music, and this was his way of establishing a dialectic between his painting and the contemporary music in which he finds the ideas of ‘superimposition’ and ‘compression’ which underpin his pictorial technique. Pieter Schoolwerth explains that compression enables him to bring together his two worlds: music and painting, in that *«the brushstroke is the vice that keeps it all together»*, like an MP3 or JPEG file contains and transmits sound and image concurrently.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1970 in St Louis, Missouri. Lives and works in New York

1994: BFA, California Institute for the Arts, Valencia, California

1991: Occidental College, Los Angeles

SOLO SHOWS (SELECTION)

2013 : Shadows Past, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels

2012 : After Troy, Michel Abreu Gallery, New York

2010 : Portraits of Paintings, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris
Portraits of Paintings, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

2009 : Art Basel - Miami Beach / Art Positions
The Z-axis Cycle, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

2008 : Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

GROUP SHOWS (SELECTION)

2012 : accrochage, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

2010 : Portraits, Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels

2009 : Adaptations: Pedro Costa, Danièle Huillet/Jean-Marie Straub: Où gît votre sourire enfoui? (film)
Pieter Schoolwerth, Portrait of 'The Concert' with Still Life (after Van Honthorst)
Leave No Trace, organized by Margaret Liu Clinton, ISCP, New York
Practice vs. Object, organized by Margaret Liu Clinton, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York

2006 : Hands up/Hands down, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York
Tomorrow Land: CalArts in Moving Picture, curated by Josh Siegel, Museum of Modern Art, New York
Palm Beach Collects: The John Morrissey Collection, curated by Sarah Gavlak, Armory Art Center, West
Palm Beach

1998 : Pop Surrealism, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut

2002 : The 195 Hudson Street, Apartment 2A Biennial, curated by Adrian Dannatt, New York
Fesitval Polyphonix, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

For more information, please contact Constance Dumas

constance.dumas@galerie-obadia.com — + 32 (0) 2 648 14 05 / +32 (0) 477 93 44 63 / +33 (0)6 275 410 47

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Bruxelles

Brenna Youngblood
Spanning Time
17 January - 6 April 2013

Pieter Schoolwerth
Shadows Past
16 April - 1 June 2013

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Paris
Bourg-Tibourg

Fiona Rae
Nouvelles Oeuvres
22 February - 25 April 2013

Enoc Perez
Paris mon amour
16 May - 1 June 2013

Jean Dewasne
Anti-sculptures
September - October 2013

Galerie Nathalie Obadia
Paris
Cloître Saint-Merri

Martin Barré (Galerie I)
1972-1977 les années décisives
4 April - 1st June 2013
Opening April 4th, 6-8 pm

Rosson Crow
6 June - 27 July 2013

Carole Benzaken
November - December 2013