

Waking the Dead

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Kuratiert von | *curated by* Daniel Kingery

“How can we recuperate the necessary ability to explore the past and yet not lose sight of the future? ... Artists seem to be once again interested in opening a window onto a very intimate reality, instead of just speculating about the limits of representation.” - Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnick, *Of Mice and Men*, 2006

“By other men's labours we are led to the sight of things most beautiful that have been wrested from darkness and brought into light; from no age are we shut out, we have access to all ages, and if it is our wish, by greatness of mind, to pass beyond the narrow limits of human weakness, there is a great stretch of time through which we may roam.”
- Seneca, *De brevitate vitae*

It seems that at the beginning of the 21st century the trajectory of art history, which started in the 19th century and was radicalized by the historical avant-garde has been exhausted. Yet without a viable alternative many artists have been turning to modernism's beginnings or the moments of its most startling breaks with history, either as an ironic commentary or a nostalgic longing for lost utopian dreams. Yet what remain are often the forms removed from their historical context, emptied of their content.

At the same time some artists are looking to a broader range of art history and incorporating that into their practice. While there is no return to the past, which is not only impossible but also undesirable, the only rule left to break is to consciously learn from those who came before modernism. Rather than just reviving that which was forgotten, the point is to reinterpret in a way that can only speak for now without being damned to remain forever only in the moment of its creation.

The artists in “Waking the Dead” are not confined by what has become the new academic mode: navel-gazing and an insistence on perpetually reinventing the wheel. They look to sources both old and new and open doors to new worlds. This is internalized and expressed in individual ways that, although stylistically different, offer art for reflection instead of sensation, for re-inventing myth or exploring the human spirit instead of de-mystifying and deconstructing for the thousandth time. Although these impulses are not only present in figurative painting and drawing, this exhibition focuses on these media for clarity's sake and to shed light on a side of the art world often pushed to the peripheries of discourse.

In his book "DADA: Art and Anti-Art", artist, film-maker and sometime Dadaist Hans Richter writes about a Valesquez painting of a court lady at the Kaiser Friedrich Museum in Berlin: "She was neither beautiful nor ugly, but a goddess, and had such presence that I never overcame my diffidence for one instant, although I copied the picture for months on end. This diffidence was not inspired by the woman but by the artist, whose soul had reached up to heaven and who had set up a court lady to speak to us from Olympus." This is why great art continues to speak to us through the ages. Richter then writes about art's continual need for the "new" blurring the distinction between good, bad and indifferent art. "Thus avant-garde exhibitions appear, which admittedly give youth it's due, but make the task of the public galleries difficult by offering the public entertainment rather than objects of contemplation, which is what real works of art are. I still think that one person who meditates before a work of art is worth more than thousands who just gawp."