

Rivane Neuenschwander

Tropics: Damned, Orgasmic and Devoted

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery is pleased to announce *Tropics: Damned, Orgasmic and Devoted*, a solo exhibition of new work by Rivane Neuenschwander in New York, September 10 - October 24, 2020.

Featuring tapestries, paintings, and drawings, as well as an installation of found and modified postcards, the presentation explores themes of fear, sexuality, politics and violence. Drawing upon myriad cultural references, Neuenschwander delves into the public and private vulnerabilities that have led to a deleterious surge in nationalism and polarization around the globe.

The title of the exhibition, inspired by poet Hilda Hilst's *Poemas Malditos, Gozosos e Devotos* (1984), precisely reflects the current sociopolitical context in Neuenschwander's native Brazil, but could easily apply to most post-colonial cultures around the world: a tropical setting *damned* throughout history as a colony of external power; *orgasmic*, as the role of exotic fantasy is projected upon its people; and *devoted*, throughout history, to dubious organized religion and faith movements. This title directly corresponds to a new series of large-scale tapestries and paintings that are based on the aesthetic of 17th century Japanese erotic wood cuts and inspired by Cordel folk literature popular in the Brazilian Northeast region. Scenes of violence are depicted in vivid colors and soft curving forms. Human bodies and anthropomorphic creatures intertwine in a brutal tug and pull, where phalluses, vulvas, and other bodily features are wrestling in muddy puddles of blood. For Neuenschwander, fear is fundamental to mapping the myriad of ways in which authoritarian governments come to power, and the necropolitics they employ in order to maintain it. Investigating how emotions can be weaponized as tools of control and contamination, *Tropics: Damned, Orgasmic and Devoted* unveils the mechanism used to perpetuate political dominance. The tapestries' beauty and their skillful craftsmanship emphasize the ambiguity of attraction and repulsion, of aesthetics and violence.

Since 2013, Neuenschwander has developed a broad research on children's fears through projects held in London, Rio de Janeiro, Bogotá, among other cities. Her interest in the theme is anchored in a long-term practice of psychoanalysis, but leads to further consideration of fear as an affectation to be manipulated in the political arena. Constituencies are infantilized, as truth and reality are treated as subjective by authoritarian regimes. *À espreita* is a new series of black and white works on paper that reflect an evolution of the artist's exploration of childhood fears and anxieties. Simple drawings by children were abstracted and converted by the artist into silhouettes, projected as oversized forms in previously exhibited installations. Transformed once again into more intimately framed works on paper, these shadowy forms have been inverted as white figures onto a black ground, appearing as ghosts or spirits. "À espreita" is a term in Portuguese which means to be "on the lookout", or "watching", specifically in the sense of the

hunter or hunted. At a moment of universal tension and anxiety, these drawings represent our shared state of being, confronting an invisible enemy, as both predator and prey.

In the rear gallery, the work *Fear of* formally weaves together the drawings, paintings and tapestries, embodying the universal fears of today's society, and therefore, its vulnerabilities. Hand written text and scrawled images are reproduced in embroidery and paint, reading: *Fear of* virus, *Fear of* sadness, *Fear of* war, *Fear of* hunger, *Fear of* the end of the world.

Finally, a large installation of vintage postcards and text, *The Order and Method*, is based on Jean-Luc Godard's *Les Carabiniers* from 1963. The story follows the journey of two peasants who are recruited to war, misled by the promise they will be rewarded with the world's wealth. In the film's climactic final scene, a sequence of postcards serve as the peasants' prized possessions, and are displayed as false triumphs. The installation creates a precise visual correspondence to the narrative, as Neuenschwander has carefully selected postcards representing each image, along with text that juxtaposes the mundane with the horrors of war. Overlaid in screen-print are two quotes from the film, "What do soldiers do before battle?" and "Before battle, soldiers are afraid." Contextualizing the psychological component of fear, this work completes the emotional spectrum presented by the other works on view and raises our consciousness to the full gamut on which emotions can operate and influence our society.

Rivane Neuenschwander is among the most critically renowned artists of her generation, living and working in São Paulo, Brazil. Her major installation *O Trabalho dos Dias (Work of Days)*, 1998, was recently featured as part of *Surrounds: 11 installations*, in the reopening exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, last year.

Winner of the Yanghyun Prize in South Korea in 2013 and shortlisted for the Guggenheim Museum's Hugo Boss Prize in 2004, the artist has exhibited her work internationally throughout the past twenty years. In 2010, the New Museum in New York presented *Rivane Neuenschwander: A Day Like Any Other*, a major survey exhibition that traveled to the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum in St. Louis, followed by the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona, Miami Art Museum, and the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin through 2012.

Other important solo presentations include shows at Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP) in Brazil (2014), Malmö Konsthall in Sweden (2010), St. Louis Art Museum in Missouri (2007), Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh (2007), Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC (2007), Palais de Tokyo in Paris (2003), the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis (2002) and Portikus in Frankfurt (2001).

The artist's work was also featured in the 55th Carnegie International at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, along with group shows at Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Kunsthalle Wein in Austria, Stedelijk Museum in The Netherlands, and Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

Currently Neuenschwander's work can be found in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Tate Modern, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Inhotim Centro de Arte Contemporânea in Brazil, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, The Israel Museum, Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, Seattle Art Museum, and the Walker Art Center, among others.