

**PRESS RELEASE**

Mark van Yetter  
*The Politics of Charm*  
February 10 - April 8, 2023

Contained inside a wooden frame, a cardboard mat encloses another type of frame: rectangular borders, delicately traced with crayon on paper. Within these latter confines, painted sequences from multiple stories are pieced together. *The Politics of Charm* begins, naturally, with a pleasant introduction that is both smooth and cautionary: the *passe-partout* is a foreword or preface<sup>1</sup> that helps ease one's way into the language of the image. Or, in another reading, it's a passage leading us to the image, and here this passage is twofold—both object and its echo—the drawing of a *passe-partout*. What follows the inner logic of this presaging opening act is a spectral choreography of mirrored images and *doppelgänger*.

Rohrschach-like symmetries, mirrors, and doubles are recurring motifs in many of Mark van Yetter's works. If the formal and psychological play performed by the doubled image is often haunting the innards of his paintings, here it becomes the organizing principle of a larger system—a 20-part series of multipliable worlds. Each work holds two rows of pictures, placed one above the other. The space around them is essential, as there is little air circulating between the three condensed and sutured sequences. Formations of color, geometries, the semblance of places, things, and human figures refract worlds that look familiar but remain mostly strange. Their weird, ambiguous objects are at once terrible and alluring. But the web of associations between the images is no less compelling. The central image of each row differs from its imperfectly mirrored flanks. Which of the two, left or right, is the real one? Which is fake? Are they both simultaneously real or simultaneously fake?

In one work, one potted plant whose leaves are reflected asymmetrically in its mirror image seems like an object beside itself at an unearthly hour. As if there was an extraneous agent, an unknown force that displaced and shifted the essence of things, just a few millimeters, just a few seconds beside the thing itself. Naturally, the central mortuary image that the two creepy pots adorn does little to lighten the mood. One would think. But it is precisely here where comedic potential is being professed, albeit subtly, through a light form of the grotesque. The latter courses through van Yetter's works, consistently, at different points, in different shapes and various degrees. Whether quite literally reminding of the lighthearted, fanciful mural ornaments in ancient Roman villas, or as Mike Kelley aptly dissected in his great essay on caricature<sup>2</sup>, furthering notions of satire, parody, scatology, burlesque, travesty. No wonder then that in the smaller still-life series, presented here, the artist's choice to depict conspicuously inconspicuous pots and vases in various spatial relations to each other, resulted less in a serene, Morandi-like still-life scenery, and more in lush Raymond Chandler glamour, with the vengeful teapot spying on the unsuspecting deflowered vase. But the humor one derives from van Yetter's works can easily tip into melancholy or tragic feeling, as his representations, use of color, and juxtaposition of painting styles are never designed to be unambiguous. Social commentary can often prove to be a tipping point.

Devices of repetition and doubling have long been the sources of both comedy and the uncanny—or, here, more appropriately, of comedy and of the weird and eerie<sup>3</sup>. The motif of the unreliable mirror image or of the (fake or real) *doppelgänger* has been explored in productions of both the former and the latter. Interestingly, in their respective analyses of comedy and of the weird and the eerie, Alenka Zupančič and Mark Fisher make similar statements: both

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<sup>1</sup> Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, The University of Chicago Press, 1987

<sup>2</sup> Mike Kelley, *Foul Perfection. Essays and criticism*, ed. by John H. Welchman, MIT Press, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie*, Repeater Books, 2016

identify the introduction of ‘a certain level of equality between two (previously) incommensurable symbolic ranks’<sup>4</sup> as crucial (Zupančič), or, as Fisher puts it, ‘the contact between incommensurable worlds’, the ‘threshold between worlds.’ Fisher goes on to observe, the form that is perhaps most appropriate to the weird is the montage. The sense of wrongness is a signal that previously employed frameworks are obsolete. What seems to inscribe Mark van Yetter’s paintings, and particularly his latest works, in this area of thought, are, then, precisely their perplexing, conjoined, un-belonging styles and narratives, painted with the swiftness and freedom in which sketches are jotted down. Having opted for paper as a support for his oil paintings, even his most lusciously painted pictures are intimately related to the free, automatic gesture of drawing. Perhaps even more so to that of the caricature and the grotesque, in both its meanings. This option underscores existing predilections towards the weird, and all the implications mentioned earlier, in Mark van Yetter’s works.

Perhaps less satirical, perhaps less melancholic than some of his previous work, van Yetter continues to cultivate a liminal poetic ambiguity—in between worlds. His new series of pictorial storytelling operates within this mode. Making an analogy to Mark Fisher’s striking description of the band The Fall: ‘The model is the novella rather than the tale and the story is told episodically, from multiple points of view, using a heteroglossic riot of styles and tones: comic, journalistic, satirical, novelistic...,’ and sometimes sentimental.

-Mihaela Chiriac

Mark van Yetter (b. 1978) lives and works in the Poconos, PA. Van Yetter co-founded exhibition space Marquise Dance Hall (2007-2015), which started as a book and record store in New York, before transitioning to an itinerant gallery in Istanbul. Current and previous solo exhibitions include *Plunderbund Charity*, Ebensperger, Berlin, GE (2022); *Damn View*, Ebensperger Rhomberg, Berlin, GE (2019); *False Friends... and Six Bottles*, Kunsthalle St. Gallen, St. Gallen, CH (2019); *Drawings 2005 - 2018: 20 Propositions* at Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg, AT (2018); *You can observe a lot by just watching*, Bridget Donahue, New York, US (2018); *We are what we walk between*, Micky Schubert, Berlin, DE (2016); *The Terrifying Abyss of Skepticism*, Bridget Donahue, New York, US (2016); *The mere knowledge of a fact is pale*, Kunsthall Stavanger, Stavanger, NO (2016); *Relentless Compassion*, VI, VII, Oslo, NO (2015). Selected group exhibitions include *Catechism*, Bridget Donahue, New York, US (2022); *Freedom & Independence*, Ebensperger, Berlin, GE (2020); *Any Day Now*, Sprüth Magers, Berlin, GE, (2020); *To confess, one must tell lies*, Clages Gallery, Cologne, GE (2019); *Nightfall*, Mendes Wood DM, Brussels, BE (2018); *All'estero & Dr. K.'s Badereise nach Riva: Version B*, Croy Nielsen, Vienna, AT (2018); *All'estero & Dr. K. Takes the Waters at Riva: Version A*, A Plus A Gallery, Venice, IT (2018); *Hütti, Ludlow 38*, New York, US (2017); *At the bar*, MD Bar, Cologne, DE (2017); *Monday is a Day Between Sunday and Tuesday*, Tanya Leighton, Berlin, DE (2017); *Group Show*, Micky Schubert, Berlin, DE (2015); *Eray Börtecene*, Sonja Weissmann, Mark van Yetter, Institut für Bienenzucht, Düsseldorf, DE (2014). Van Yetter was the recipient of the Fürstenberg Zeitgenössisch Residency in 2016.

Mihaela Chiriac (b. 1984) is a curator and co-founder of the project space STATIONS in Berlin, Germany.

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<sup>4</sup> Alenka Zupančič, *The Odd One In. On Comedy*, MIT Press, 2008