

Oldenburger Kunstverein

Jagoda Bednarsky & Felix Kultau
Heavy Meta / Shadowland
12.05. – 30.07.2023

Text: Anna Meinecke (translated to English by Scott Pearsall)

Gaps appear in the pearly smile of a once-bright future, signalling the arrival of disaster. In dream interpretation, the loss of teeth is not a good omen. Death, conflict, loss of control – it's a matter of interpretation. The attraction of the uncanny forbids unambiguity.

Jagoda Bednarsky and Felix Kultau opt for the ludicrous promise of intoxicating visual worlds. On Kultau's locker doors, the breakdown of the social order is only a belladonna away. Bednarsky's roosters are already *tripping*. With mad pupils and eye rings extending to the wattles, they swirl amidst psychedelically vibrating fields of colour. Already exhausted, but still awake.

Bednarsky and Kultau are exhibiting together for the fifth time. "Heavy Meta / Shadowland" is the distillate of a struggle for demarcation. Bednarsky and Kultau studied together at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, developed their artistic practice individually, and yet always saw the other shine through in their own work. The aversion toward the topos of the artist couple would prove to be, if not unfounded, then surmountable.

In the Oldenburg Kunstverein, Kultau's wooden screen may obstruct the view of Bednarsky's painting, but the supposed obstacle directs viewers towards the canvas at the same time. The diversions sharpen the view: her drop, his tear, her fading sea of roses, his oversized medicinal plant.

"Heavy Meta / Shadowland" is replete with stimuli and references. Pointed nipples, sacred window arches, juggler with shawm, Artemis and the stag. Behind the overpowering aesthetic, trepidation and scepticism simmer in the face of a future where existential dread is diluted as anxiety and the front camera of a smartphone serves as a substitute to interpersonal connection.

Enthralled by the grotesque, Bednarsky and Kultau take a sensual stroll down the paths of black romanticism. In the dim illumination of the light boxes, under the scrutinising gaze of the crescent moon, fantasy and madness touch in their "Heavy Meta / Shadowland".

"Dark forebodings of a cruel, threatening, fate spread themselves over me like dark clouds," is how the student Nathanael prophesies his downfall in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman". The shadow becomes the harbinger of doom.

Those who rise cast a shadow over others. Or so they say. Bednarsky and Kultau also cast shadows, yet these shadows entwine where they fundamentally belong together. The fateful transfiguration of the abject is far from their minds. Kultau comments on conformist organisational furniture with a six-point plan to obtain happiness. Bednarsky theatricalises the evening glow with a ribbon. The exaggeration of longing pushes the dream into reality.

Heinrich Heine once had a maiden stand by the sea. The sun was setting and the maiden sighed at the impending loss. Then, freely adapted from Bednarsky, Mr. Romantic came along and said, "Calm down, it'll be back tomorrow."

At the end of the exhibition space, a curtain enacts a beginning. A wooden hand gathers the fabric to provide a little bit of beguiling perspective – *and they say chivalry is dead*.

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