

With MALERMEESE – MEESERMALER the Museum der Moderne Salzburg presents a comprehensive retrospective of the artist Jonathan Meese's pictorial works. Meese, born in Tokyo in 1970, lives and works in Ahrensburg and Berlin. From 1995 to 1998 he studied at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg under Franz Erhard Walther. He is currently among the most outstanding German artists of his generation. His original, distinctive visual language with its expressive force has also achieved a unique status in the international art scene. On the basis of exemplary works, the chronologically arranged show provides the first overview of the entire spectrum and development of Meese's painting. Focus is hereby on the broadest and most important segment of his artistic work, which also includes sculptures, performances, installations, and works for the stage.

A grappling with the formal language of classical modernism can still be seen in Meese's first oil paintings from 1992 to 1994. An increased involvement with painting came again beginning in 2000, after which Meese turned predominantly to performance and installations for several years. He then transferred the idea of the stage as a staged counter world, which is so fundamental to his work, to large-format "history paintings," which display an intense occupation with characters and motifs from high and popular culture.

Central aspects of his oeuvre are also the portrait and self-portrait genres. Meese enacts sophisticated role playing in his self-depictions. Here, he is searching for something mask-like and superficial rather than his own personal identity, which he varies in playful, imagined self-orbiting.

Meese's work is shaped by an occupation with personalities from world history, with ancient myths and epics. The artist condenses these motifs together with motifs from popular culture to what is literally a "fantastical" whole. He thereby inexorably proclaims his utopian concept of a "dictatorship of art," whereby a decisive element is the grappling with ostracized figures and symbols of German (contemporary) history. In his paintings, Meese deconstructs these figures and symbols, which in many cases are grotesquely overdrawn, to mere ornaments or in the mix with trash and toys leads them ad absurdum. Through the systematic, inflationary use of these systems, which in the context of the depiction are delinked from their original message, the artist intends to neutralize them. Their inefficacy in the present should thus be reinforced. Meese is well aware of the fact that this also provokes public debate. However, for him, it is primarily about safeguarding the freedom of art, which should not subordinate itself to any social or political conventions.

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