

DEBORAH SCHAMONI
Mauerkircherstr. 186
D-81925 München

Mariann Metsis
Bals des victimes
06.12.24 – 15.02.25

Whether the French decadents of the postrevolutionary generation really gathered at Victims' Balls or not, they fantasized about doing so, passing these fantasies on through generations, all the way to us. – Alexander Etkind

Deborah Schamoni is pleased to present Mariann Metsis' first solo exhibition with the gallery and in Germany. *Bals des victimes* consists of a series of new works painted specifically for the space.

Bals des victimes is the ghost of the violence of the Revolution. One that was needed then and might be needed now. Metsis cuts the linearity of historical reference by working with both propaganda infused traces of Socialist Realism inherent to art in Estonia where she grew up and the moment of contemporary accelerationism present in London where she resides. The works are presented in groups, creating conversations between the subjects. On the first two paintings, one encounters a woman in office clothes with her hands in the air mid-expression, with a submissive greyhound on her side – one is in the search from answers from another.

Throughout the gallery one is confronted by the gaze of animals, whilst the human figures hide in the hue. Walking down the room a lazy seal stares back at you, whilst a wild sheep is in the midst of what looks like a nervous breakdown. Characterized to the history of painting in Estonia, the abstraction has not been reached through figuration but through colours, layers and associations. The context remains undefined whereas the protagonists become subject to the viewers association and memories in recognizing who they might be and what might they be going through. A notion written into the history of figuration in Post-Soviet spaces emerges due to the state censor and having to hide subtext in art that would visually look socialist realist in passing.

On the wall opposite the duo is a triptych of theatre binoculars, a figure in a gown and yet another dog. All three playing with spectatorship informed by the hyper fast, image obsessed globalism forcing us into roles to enact. Performativity is a theme present throughout the show – a seal with a ball on its nose triggers a bittersweet feeling of nostalgia, the domestication of animals and training them to entertain us. Metsis exposes the similarity of the visual compositions once scraped from signifiers, whether it is propaganda posters or red-carpet paparazzi shots that we talk about. Through the work, Metsis ruminates about how history functions: the past is not dead; it insists, returns, and contaminates the present. Her nonlinear treatment of time thus reveals the illusion of historical progress, unfolding in the pentimenti of the painting.

In 2022, one of the last independent TV-channels in Russia *The Rain* was forced to close by the government, they ended their last news reading with the whole staff leaving the room, followed by an extended play of *Swan Lake* by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. The contemporary is said to be haunted by the ghost of communism that never was, but what would the ball of the ghosts that actually were look like?

Text: Niina Ulfsak

Mariann Metsis (1991) was born in Tallinn, Estonia, and has lived in London for over a decade. She studied at Central Saint Martin College of Art & Design in London; The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna; and obtained a BA in Fine Arts from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London.