

## **TULIP HYSTERIA**

**Bojan Šumonja**

**TROTOAR, Zagreb, Croatia**

**March 28 – May 10, 2025**

TROTOAR is pleased to present *Tulip Hysteria*, a new series of paintings by Croatia-based artist Bojan Šumonja. In his first exhibition with the gallery, Šumonja fuses a classical, painterly approach with contemporary iconography, placing figures from Western pop culture—Donald Duck, the Purple Smurf, plastic flamingos, and more—into eerie, dystopian Istrian landscapes strewn with wild garbage dumps. His rich, expressive brushstrokes and luminous surfaces evoke a classical sensibility, while delicate, intricate strokes in this series create a sense of dematerialization, conjuring the ethereal, dreamy presence of a forest.

*From the exhibition text:*

*Tulip Hysteria Co-ordinating* is the title of one of fifteen works from a new series of paintings by the Pula artist Bojan Šumonja exhibited at the Trotoar Gallery. To some extent, the works refer to his previous painting cycle *The Great Observer* from 2024. The heroes of the paintings are Donald Duck, the Purple Smurf, plastic flamingos, Christmas reindeer, skulls, insects, and flying sprouted potatoes – relics of personal memory and archetypes of Western pop culture, which are now coming into a new role. They are placed in the dystopic settings of Istrian forests, among the wild garbage dumps that are so very familiar to the artist. He describes the creative process behind the paintings' creation as instinctive and spontaneous, and familiar iconography is placed in the midst of events that exist outside of the present time and space. In some works, textual "watermarks" appear, as well as mirrored reflections of the characters in various phases of their lives, which draws attention to the artist's consideration of metaphysical and ontological issues. Unexpected and surprising elements are here because, in addition to reflections on themes such as identity, consciousness, irony, humour, spirit, and meaning, they are attempting to surprise the artist himself. According to Šumonja, the best paintings are made when the artist is able to create some distance from his own familiar self.

What does this have to do with the twentieth-century events mentioned above? What does the title *Tulip Hysteria Co-ordinating* even imply? Historical avant-garde and especially Dadaists, were famous for their absurdist works, so the title certainly, in some sense, expresses their fascination with linguistic games and absurd combinations of words, a frequent element in their art. Ultimately, it can be interpreted as a comment on the art market, the rise in the price of artworks, and a reference to "Tulip Mania", the historical financial crisis in the Netherlands in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, an expression that is frequently used metaphorically to characterise irrational and high-risk financial movements.

Šumonja fills this space by giving his work the title of a non-existent artwork that served as a catalyst for change and the perception of modern art, and drew attention to the absurdities and

anomalies of a particular community. In doing so, he skilfully draws attention to the universal principles of artistic work: the desire for change, a shift in perception, and an escape from the known self. These are the elements which ultimately make all the difference, transforming an average work into a good one, whether it be collective or individual.

Text by Tena Bakšaj

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bojan Šumonja (1960, Pula, Croatia) graduated from the Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia in Italy. His work as a painter has developed within the realm of neoexpressionist aesthetics, exploring the transformation of traditional figures and landscapes, along with references to mythology and history painting, and the influence of the poetics of comics and film. His works form part of the permanent exhibitions and collections of the National Museum of Modern Art in Zagreb, the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Rijeka, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Istria in Pula, the Rovinj City Museum, the Piran Coastal Galleries, and numerous other public and private collections. He is a co-founder and artistic director of the Poola Gallery in Pula, and a member of the informal art group One Dollar Bill, with Marko Jakše and Pierre Tol.