

Jonathan Monk

Into the Trees, Into the Trees

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Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe

At the turn of the 1980s, the British post-punk band The Cure recorded their enduring gothic rock track 'A Forest'. The song, released during Jonathan Monk's formative school years, is a hallucinatory anthem of ambiguous meaning, in which the lyrics 'into the trees, into the trees' are repeatedly intoned by Robert Smith, the band's lead vocalist. And it is with this enigmatic refrain that Monk invites you to enter his new exhibition at Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe.

Into the Trees, Into the Trees expands Monk's ongoing exploration of the work of the mononymous Italian artist Salvo (1947–2015), who began his career as a painter, then briefly became a part of the Arte Povera movement in the 1960/70s, only to return to painting. Today, Salvo is most widely recognised for the dreamy landscapes of the latter part of his career – romanticised composites of simplified architectural and environmental elements, including (most significantly in this context), trees.

Monk encountered Salvo's work while living in Rome and, drawn to this shifting identity, started reworking the Italian painter's imagery around 2016 – printing reproductions of Salvo's landscapes and selectively concealing the backgrounds with paint, leaving only isolated trees floating on variegated backdrops of abstract pigment. This body of work highlights Monk's long-standing interest in ideas around authorship and appropriation. It also highlights another central theme of his practice: an exploration of the economics of the art market. Monk prices his 'Salvo paintings' according to the number of trees present, eschewing traditional metrics of artistic value.

Later, Monk began layering Salvo's landscapes over images from art history and beyond. For instance, *Into the Trees, Into the Trees* features a group of 10 paintings, *Salvo Trees X Flowers Andy*, in which amended Salvo landscapes are placed over reproductions of a series of Andy Warhol flower screen-prints from 1970. By juxtaposing Salvo with the figure who arguably championed reproduction more than any other artist of the twentieth century, Monk reinforces this body of work's scrutiny of ideas around reproduction, authenticity and value.

Monk continues to explore these questions in his new series *If in Doubt add a Salvo*. For these pieces, Monk renders trees from Salvo's landscapes as three-dimensional reliefs, which he subsequently adds to different supports. As with the paintings, these works too are priced per tree. The varied supports range from simple, white-washed wooden backdrops and recycled transportation pallets, to a kitsch t-shirt depicting cartoon cats riding a Vespa. For others, Monk has cannibalised his own artworks, creating a dialogue between his current and historic practice. Drawing also on the legacy of bricolage and found objects in contemporary art, Monk plays with how the value of different objects – from scrap materials to his own paintings – can be changed through artistic intervention.

Drawing on the work of others (as well as his own) has become a hallmark of Monk's practice. The near-impossibility of pure artistic originality is a subject that the artist has spoken about at length, which is why Monk wears his references so boldly. But it could also be seen to embody the story of art in its broadest sense. With its history of destruction and recreation, and of dismantling and rebuilding, artistic production is a (seemingly) endless cycle of creation and reiteration, destined to repeat itself – much like the final line of The Cure's hallucinatory anthem of ambiguous meaning: 'Again and again and again and again...'