

## CHAMP LACOMBE

**Norbert Schwontkowski** (1949 – 2013, Bremen) is one of the most renowned and influential of German painters.

He applied his inexhaustible pictorial inventiveness both to fundamental questions of the human condition and to the absurdity of daily life. Throughout his career, he created works heavy with humour, but always poised at the edge of an abyss. He possessed a virtuoso command of insinuation and the surreal, articulating a language of quiet estrangement.

His works were made using hand ground pigments, mixed with various materials to yield a multitude of textures. Light sensitive chemicals such as silver oxide, iodide, nitrate and bromide, added to the pigments, creating shimmering and multifaceted surfaces, that continue to evolve over time. The works are abundant and alive.

Schwontkowski's palette remains one of his most enigmatic tools. Faintly soiled whites, corroded greys, the green of oxidized metal, rusted reds, soft ochres drained of warmth – the artist tones were not just decorative, but also psychological. They perform a kind of emotional tuning, establishing a tonality that is never directly illustrative, yet always atmospheric. Even his brighter usages arrive in dusty haze, never quite resolute. Colour in Schwontkowski's works is not applied to describe form but to fog it, mute it, slow it down, to enable the viewer to grasp at its coldness.

His figures often appear in a state of half-presence – floating portraits, lost in thought; objects bound to uncertain logic; scenes edged with emptiness. Absurdity finds a quiet, almost natural terrain – not as a comic device, but as a fundamental condition of existence. Humour is subdued, never stated, always elusive.

This is a world in which shadows are just as important and real as the objects and shapes that produce them. While Schwontkowski resisted direct self-portraiture, these works suggest a deeply introspective practice: a self embedded not in representation, but in the texture of things. His art does not proclaim the ego; it traces its evaporation. What remains is not absence, but intimacy.

*“Most of my paintings come from a dream, which is never fixed. It is more like the feeling when you are travelling on a train without a destination, or in the early morning when you just wake, when you are still in between a dream and the thoughts of what you have to do for the day-like what sort of shirt and pants you will wear and who you'll see for lunch, and so on. Essentially, it comes from a moment when there is not so much control of your thoughts or what you could actually see. Your eyes are open, and you think you can see whatever's in front of you, but in fact there is something from this corner of your vision, which somehow melts together and becomes something you can't identify whatsoever. I think this is the way poetry works, by allowing things to come together and bloom and become something else, something fresh and alive.”*

**Norbert Schwontkowski**

**Schwontkowski** studied painting at the University of the Arts in Bremen and the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg. Following teaching positions in Hamburg, Bremen, and Greifswald, and a guest lectureship in Braunschweig, he was appointed Professor of Painting at the University of Fine Arts in Hamburg in 2005.

His work has been exhibited widely in galleries and museums internationally, and is held in numerous public collections, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, US), the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston, US), the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Wellington, NZ), the Hall Art Foundation (Reading, US), the Rubell Museum (Miami, US), Kunsthalle zu Kiel (DE), Kunsthalle Bremen (DE), Neues Museum (Nuremberg, DE), Pinakothek der Moderne (Munich, DE), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen (Dresden, DE), Kolumba Museum (Cologne, DE), Kunstmuseum Den Haag (NL), and the Weserburg Museum of Modern Art (Bremen, DE).

This exhibition spans Champ Lacombe's spaces in Biarritz and London, and is presented in collaboration with the Estate of Norbert Schwontkowski. It is accompanied by a dedicated catalogue featuring an essay by Dr. Isabella Maidment (ISBN 979-8-89170-345-2). These are Schwontkowski's first solo exhibitions in both cities.