JOHANNES VOGT

Michael Swaney, "Zanni Zann Za Z"
November 8 – December 8, 2018

Johannes Vogt Gallery is pleased to present the first solo show by Canadian artist **Michael Swaney**, "Zanni Zann Za Z." The exhibition features recent mixed media paintings and drawings that present comedic, yet piercingly cynical views of the mundane. In these works, Swaney assumes the role of a harlequin or "Zanni", creating a series of faux-naif paintings that blur the lines between the genres of drawing and painting.

Just a few years ago Swaney's practice underwent a critical change in style: very complex, multi-layered compositions of interior spaces that showed a high amount of detailed image information gave way to an extremely simplified approach of making an image. Much like in his drawing practice Swaney treats the canvas like a raw piece of paper, leaving a significant amount of canvas untouched. By preserving the blank substrate he is engaging with it. The resulting image seems to read like graffiti on the subway, a quick transfer of information with little if nothing more to think about. But there is deeper sense and meaning to these images and messages than the artist wants to make us believe at first glance.

The Zanni in the historic "Commedia dell' Arte" is usually a double faced character. He appears as a dull fool at first and often surprises the audience unexpectedly with phrases that offer piercing wit; this character that appears seemingly slow otherwise, transgresses into a teacher, sometimes even clairvoyant - in either case he is more often than not the darling of the audience because he speaks his mind at all cost. Similarly Swaney offers perspectives in his imagery that will surprise the viewer at second glance. Just as Picasso viewed himself as a harlequin, Swaney dons the mantle of the "zany" zanni. By assuming the role of this character Swaney gives us as the viewers the chance to redefine some of our preconceptions of life.

In *Looking to the Past* and *Looking to the Future*, we see a spread of harlequins miming and ridiculing nostalgia and the anxiety towards the future. Swaney deliberately plays with the triggered associations of his simplified painting style but - not dissimilar to the cruelty one might discover in the seemingly harmless stories in children's books or the spiking truths in the jokes of a clown - the message lies underneath, concealed at first but poignant when discovered. When a child draws an object they portray the idea of the object rather than the object itself. In *Zanni Zann Za Z*, Swaney portrays his vision of the world as distortions of the audience's expectation. It becomes the task of the audience to navigate through these signs like the character in a play who tries to decipher the ravings of a harlequin.

Michael Swaney was born in 1978 in Kimberley, British Columbia, Canada, and currently lives and works in Barcelona, Spain. He studied at the Capilano University in Vancouver, Canada. His recent solo exhibitions include Charlotte Fogh Gallery, Aarhus, Rafael Pérez Hernando, Madrid, GNYP Gallery, Berlin and Sculptures & Groceries, Krets, Malmö, Hut 1 Paintings 4, Blokker, Madrid. He participated recently in The Dot Project, London, Needles And Pens, San Francisco, Left Field Gallery, San Luis Obispo, and Ever Gold (Projects), San Francisco. His most comprehensive solo show opened in September 2018 at L21 Gallery in Mallorca, Spain.

Johannes Vogt Gallery is committed to bringing attention to the complex artistic and cultural ties that bind New York to Europe, the Americas, and beyond. The gallery program features a strong roster of emerging to mid-career artists and has become known for reintroducing established artists to new audiences, including Garth Evans, Mernet Larsen, and Abby Leigh, among others. Founded in 2011, Johannes Vogt first opened at 526 West 26th Street in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood, where it resided before relocating to 55 Chrystie Street in the Lower East Side. In September 2018, the gallery relocated to the Upper East Side at 958 Madison Avenue.