

## PRESS RELEASE

### MELENCOLIA

Jean-Marie Appriou, Omar Ba, Martin Boyce, Joe Bradley, Valentin Carron, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Verne Dawson, David Deutsch, Carroll Dunham, Melanie Ebenhoch, Koichi Enomoto, Sam Falls, Louisa Gagliardi, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Stanislava Kovalcikova, Tobias Pils, Liesl Raff, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Ugo Rondinone, Dieter Roth, Athi-Patra Ruga, Steven Shearer, Josh Smith, Uman, Aleksandra Waliszewska, Franz West

November 11, 2023 – February 24, 2024

Opening on Friday, November 10, 11 am – 8 pm

Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present the group show *MELENCOLIA*. The exhibition showcases new and important works by both gallery artists as well as carefully selected other positions, including Jean-Marie Appriou, Omar Ba, Martin Boyce, Joe Bradley, Valentin Carron, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Verne Dawson, David Deutsch, Carroll Dunham, Melanie Ebenhoch, Koichi Enomoto, Sam Falls, Louisa Gagliardi, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Stanislava Kovalcikova, Tobias Pils, Liesl Raff, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Ugo Rondinone, Dieter Roth, Athi-Patra Ruga, Steven Shearer, Josh Smith, Uman, Aleksandra Waliszewska, and Franz West. The exhibition title is a reference to Eva Presenhuber's first major group show of the same name, which she curated in 1988 at the Vienna gallery of the pioneering Austrian gallerist Grita Insam (born 1931 and died 2011 in Vienna, AT). In turn, this title paid homage to *Albrecht Dürer's* iconic engraved master print *Melencolia I* (1514) which depicts an enigmatic and somber winged female as the personification of human melancholy. The exhibited works touch upon the complexity and depth of this sentiment.

**Jean-Marie Appriou's** (born 1986 in Brest, FR) sculptures evoke archaic forms and are inspired by contemporary but also mythological and futuristic worlds. His works are often crafted from aluminum and bronze, the design possibilities of which the artist furthers through experimentation with other materials. By alluding to familiar forms, be they animal or human, and developing his unique, almost alchemical approach to his source material, Appriou has created his very own mythology.

**Omar Ba's** (born 1977 in Senegal) paintings are produced using a variety of techniques and materials and depict political and social motifs with multiple interpretations. His plastic vocabulary reactivates historical and timeless questions, while at the same time developing an artistic statement that is absolutely contemporary. Ba's iconography draws on personal metaphors, ancestral references and hybrid figures. His work rejects a didactic narrative and seeks, through its enigmatic character and poetic intensity, to express his unconscious and his symbolic apprehension of reality.

**Martin Boyce** (born 1967 in Hamilton, UK) reworks and references the textures and forms of the built environment. Using the iconography of the everyday alongside the formal and conceptual histories of modern architecture and design, his sculptures often form poetic landscapes which merge interior and exterior spaces. Alongside his large-scale, site-specific installations, Boyce's output also encompasses the reimagining of more modest utilitarian objects. Vents, screens, telephone booths, fireplaces and lanterns are incorporated into a wider body of work imbued with the language of urbanism and punctuated with moments of unexpected tenderness and beauty.

**Joe Bradley's** (born 1975 in Maine, ME, US) versatile painterly oeuvre has suggested allusions to Abstract Expressionism, to Philip Guston, or to Minimal Art, all with a very contemporarily distant, not entirely tangible twist that nonchalantly oscillates between irony and melancholy. Recently, however, Bradley has developed a new visual language that is entirely his own and also sparked a dialogue between his canvases and his works on paper—as if they were nodding to each other.

In his sculptures and collages, **Valentin Carron** (born 1977 in Martigny, CH) imitates traditional handicrafts and unknown artworks, as well as stereotypical modern and everyday forms. By appropriating these objects and styles, he questions originality, authenticity, and identity in the globalized world. He reformulates traditional handicrafts,

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mainly from his Swiss homeland, by substituting natural materials like wood for synthetic materials; conversely, he commissions well-trained craftsmen to create precious works imitating cheap industrial articles.

**Jonathan Lyndon Chase** (born 1989 in Philadelphia, PA, US) is an interdisciplinary artist who works in painting, video, sound, and sculpture to depict queer Black love and community. Rendered through layers of bright, visceral paint, make-up and glitter, Chase's figures are suspended in various forms of articulation amidst the backdrop of urban and domestic spaces. These dynamic compositions blend emotional and physical, internal and external states of being to challenge and subvert canonical misrepresentations and exclusion of the Black body.

**Verne Dawson's** (born 1955 in Meridianville, AL, US) approach to subject matter in his paintings is that of an anthropologist with knowledge of ancient concepts of time telling, how they have affected our environment and humankind throughout social and technical evolutions, and in what ways they are still present in our contemporary, everyday culture. He bridges the gap between past, present, and future, with astronomy and myth. His paintings of ideas and stories express an integration of civilization with nature and the ways we perceive and experience life.

**David Deutsch's** (born 1943 in Los Angeles, CA, US) art blurs the lines between abstraction and figuration, challenging the perception that these are irreconcilable. He believes both paths lead to artistic truth, embodying content within fluid marks. Recent works feature small figures and imagery within abstract compositions, akin to historical paintings elevating landscapes with figures. These figures reflect viewers, engaging them in the artwork's scopical structure. While narrative isn't explicit, the paintings evoke human existence in a tumultuous world. Deutsch's unique process involves acrylic transfer from plastic to canvas, imparting immediacy and requiring a different mode of observation.

Since the 1980s, **Carroll Dunham** (born 1949 in New Haven, CT, US) has developed a unique visual language while creating a significant oeuvre encompassing painting, drawing, print, and sculpture. Minimalist at the outset, his abstract but organic forms became increasingly concrete, depicting series of recurrent figures. For a time, Dunham was principally preoccupied with the motif of bathers and the lush landscapes surrounding them, as well as with single trees. The personages depicted sustained several changes but always stemmed from precursory forms in his work.

**Melanie Ebenhoch's** (born in 1985 in Feldkirch, AT) work is characterized by the interactions of painterly and architectural spaces that are charged with projections of the subconscious. Stylistic elements of illusionist painting as well as cinematic presentations haunt her works. They display a spectacle of inner-psycho-social conflicts that are ignited in domestic settings in order to question the habitual way in which they are perceived.

**Koichi Enomoto** (Born in 1977, Osaka, JP) is known for collage-like paintings which refer to the social conditions surrounding him, continues to seek to capture the ongoing changes in the world through the power of images. In 2020 when the COVID-19 led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide, Enomoto fumbled for how we could continue behaving as humans. In this density of the paintings, he mounts a narrative of compulsive ideas in a multidimensional world.

Concerned with the intimacy of time, the illustration of place, and exploration of mortality, **Sam Falls** (born 1984 in San Diego, CA, US) has created his own formal language by intertwining photography's core parameters of time and exposure with nature and her elements. Working largely outdoors with vernacular materials and nature as a site-specific subject, Falls abandons mechanical reproduction in favor of a more symbiotic relationship between subject and object. In doing so, he bridges the gap between photography, sculpture, and painting, as well as the divide between artist, object, and viewer.

**Louisa Gagliardi's** (born 1989 in Sion, CH) paintings exist as reflections: internally, of artist and viewer, and of the rapid acceleration of technology in our visualized and socialized worlds. Their liminal status, as both digitally rendered images and physically confronting objects, speaks as much to contemporary concerns of self-mediated personas as they do to the compositions and narratives of the classics of art history.

The sculptor **Matthew Angelo Harrison** (born 1989 in Detroit, MI, US) is known for his clear block "encapsulations" of found African artifacts that scrutinize and bring a lens to the ineradicable effects of racism and colonialization.

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With rigorous technical methods, Harrison enshrines the found objects, such as African wooden sculptures and bone, in acrylic resin, plexiglass, and industrial modeling clay that he then sculpts using computer numerical control (CNC) machines. Harrison has also used these manufacturing techniques to encase recent artifacts of the American working class, speaking to labor and inequality, the politics of mass production, and anthropology.

**Stanislava Kovalcikova** (born 1988 in Czechoslovakia) creates dreamlike, bizarre scenarios inhabited by human and animal characters who operate outside of social norms. The alienation of the familiar is a key stylistic device she employs. Her paintings' protagonists defy categorization, are gender-fluid, fantasy beings with ambiguous social origins, timeless age, and indeterminable skin color, as well as inscrutable intentions. Their relationships cannot be interpreted with any clarity and appear both captivating and disturbing.

**Tobias Pils'** (Born 1971 in Linz, AT) black, white, and grayscale paintings and graphic works are almost beyond interpretation. His painting process is characterized by planning, which then negates itself throughout its execution. As a result, representation flips into abstraction, figuration turns into composition. Pils' work creates an unease of interpretation and challenges the notion of subjectivity in painting: His method follows intuition and is created in the context of the painter's everyday.

**Liesl Raff's** (born 1979 in Stuttgart, DE) sculptures delve into the intricacies and boundaries of physical and social interactions through a deep appreciation of a wide range of materials and persistent experimentation. Her work is characterized by a semiotics of materials, which begins where words supposedly fail. Notably, in recent years, her artistic practice has incorporated natural rubber in a way that allows for the organic material to offer numerous adaptable uses and reveal its shape-shifting attitudes. Her work is never about struggling against the materials she uses, but rather about carefully living with and learning from them, opening up spaces for engagement and ultimately suspending the distance between the work and the viewer altogether.

**Tim Rollins and K.O.S.** (born 1955 in Pittsfield, MA, US, and died 2017 in New York, NY, US) is an artist collective that was founded by the late Tim Rollins in the early 1980s as a project for young people growing up in the South Bronx. The group created works using whatever they had to hand: bricks from torn-down buildings in the neighborhood, used school materials, textbooks, and notebooks. With a strong political motivation and shocked by conditions in the South Bronx, Rollins developed a unique learning environment that ultimately turned into the artist group the Kids of Survival.

**Ugo Rondinone** (born 1964 in Brunnen, CH) is recognized as one of the major voices of his generation, an artist who composes searing meditations on nature and the human condition while establishing an organic formal vocabulary that fuses a variety of sculptural and painterly traditions. The breadth and generosity of his vision of human nature have resulted in a wide range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects, installations, videos, and performances. His hybridized forms, which borrow from ancient and modern cultural sources alike, exude pathos and humor, going straight to the heart of the most pressing issues of our time, where modernist achievement and archaic expression intersect.

The late **Dieter Roth** (born 1930 in Hannover, DE, and died 1998 in Basel, CH) was a poet, graphic artist, and intermedia action and object artist. He is considered one of the most influential protagonists of art in the second half of the 20th century, whose diverse oeuvre cannot be assigned to any conventional art category. Roth is well known for creating art objects made of organic material that had undergone a process of gradual change and decay, including hermetically sealed spices, mold, and even chocolate.

**Athi-Patra Ruga** (born 1984 in Umtata, ZA) creates alternative identities and uses these avatars as a way to parody and critique the existing political and social status quo of post-apartheid South Africa. Ruga's artistic approach of creating myths and alternate realities is in some way an attempt to view the traumas of the last 200 years of colonial history from a place of detachment – at a farsighted distance where wounds can be contemplated outside of personalized grief and subjective defensiveness. The philosophical allure and allegorical value of utopia has been central to Ruga's practice. His construction of a mythical metaverse populated by characters which he has created and depicted in his work have allowed Ruga to create an interesting space of self reflexivity in which political, cultural and social systems can be critiqued and parodied.

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For over 20 years, **Steven Shearer** (born 1968 in New Westminster, BC, CA) has worked with a wide range of materials including, print, sculpture, painting, drawing, and collaged found photography. Shearer has become increasingly well known for his adept portraits of figures painted within interior spaces. These portraits recall figures from past music subcultures and art historical paintings and are rendered employing stylistic references from Fauvism and Symbolism to German Romantic Art. Reconfiguring Renaissance systems of perspective, he creates complex perspectival elements within the compositions that animate the viewer's engagement with his paintings.

**Josh Smith** (born 1976 in Okinawa, JP) first gained attention in the early 2000s with a series of paintings of his name, which he later began to unwind to create a series of sharp, colorful, and inscrutable abstract paintings. In recent years, the abstract paintings morphed into more pictorial works of singular subjects such as leaves, fish, skeletons, reapers, and palm trees. These subjects were partially chosen because they can be easily rendered by almost anyone who cares to try. Therefore, the rendering of an image does not over-engage itself with any attempt towards pictorial virtuosity. For Smith, paintings are largely hosts for expression and experimentation.

**Uman's** (born 1980 in Somalia) varied migrations and encounters with contrasting heritage power her bold gestural work. Exuberant, seemingly freestyle markings are influenced by the Arabic calligraphy she studied as a child. Similarly, her distorted self-portraits, talismanic found objects and silhouette images of camels, birds and vessels merge abstraction with figuration, while reflecting her East African desert heritage. Widely traveled and self-trained, Uman's practice explores gender and cultural fluidity through paintings, drawings and sculpture, while remaining spiritually engaged and instinctive.

**Aleksandra Waliszewska** (born 1976 in Warsaw, PL) openly demonstrates inter-dependencies and her own influences. It seems that giving an actual shape to both imaginary and real fears, sense of being lost, and terror of the unknown, constitute important factors at play. Human frailty is being exorcised in the artist's world in a very peculiar way. Borderless savagery exists here next to a craving for consolation and longing for universal Arcadia. Sometimes she focuses her attention on violence inflicted on helpless beings. But beyond the predilection, genuine or only suggested, for all matters considered to be truly evil, fatal, serious care and compassion is ever present in Waliszewska's paintings.

**Franz West** (born 1947 and died 2012 in Vienna, AT) was an internationally renowned sculptor who is considered one of the most influential artists of the past 50 years. He began to develop his works in the 1970s, centered around sculpture but also including drawing and collage. From the 1980s, West focused on art as something to use and communicate with by inventing the Passstücke—Adaptives. These are sculptures that can be touched and worn by the viewer, situating themselves somewhere in between a trap and a supporting device. West referred to them as incarnations of neurosis. In the following years, West produced a significant oeuvre of sculptures made of plaster and Papier-mâché, furniture, collages, and large-scale sculptures, which were often intended for public spaces.

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