

For Immediate Release:

Jonathan Meese
“La Chambre de Balthus III”
May 8th through June 9th, 2001
Opening Reception May 8th, 7-9 pm.

Leo Koenig Inc. is pleased to announce the solo exhibition of new work by German artist, Jonathan Meese. Long known for his saturated installations and energetic performances, Meese is presenting a series of paintings and drawings for his first New York solo exhibition. La Chambre de Balthus III marks the third of a series of installations of paintings, sculptures and drawings, the first being in Hanover at the Kestner Gesellschaft and the second at FRI-Art Centre d'Art Contemporain in Fribourg, Switzerland.

Rooted in shades of Living Theater and the Viennese actionists, Meese has been known to “invoke” controversial figures from history during his performances. Surrounded by constructed labyrinths brimming with pop-culture icons and numerous self-portraits, Meese enters a seemingly trancelike state. Repeating gestures and phrases, Meese evinces an atmosphere of mystification that in turn, renders his audience into a state of astonishment. His watchers are at odds at how they should respond. The figures he conjures up are at once noble and notorious. The very act of mentioning their names oftentimes brings with it a serious responsibility. But with Meese, seriousness never appears without a hint of sarcasm, grandeur never appears without a trace of lyrical melancholy.

Meese's first foray into art however, was through painting. It was only after attending the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg studying with Franz Ehrhardt Walther, that Meese abandoned painting and concentrated on installation work. Throughout the past few years, Meese had turned to installation and performances both as an “existential exploration of what could be central to art,”¹ as well as an exorcism of sorts, from the strictures and confinement of canvas.

Always reinventing himself, Meese has now returned to painting and drawing. Here, Meese inverts this idea of painting's confinement by inventing his own, more severe constraints. His palette is reduced to shades of black gray and brown. The repetition of his performances become the figures that reappear in his portraits. At the core of his work remains an unrelenting sense of history. And once again historical and mythical personages coexist with/through Meese's self-portraits. Meese appears with Balthus looming, as Imhotep, resigned. Twin sisters in pigtails look through decades of conformity in search of a childhood that never existed. They did not avert their eyes to the unpleasantness of the passage of time, they observed and were affected. The paintings are the antithesis of slick, pop, commercially appropriated works.

The gallery itself reverberates with historical lineage. As the studio of famous civil war photographer, Mathew Brady, 359 Broadway was one of the first photo portrait studios in the United States. It would seem that Meese's portraits have found a most appropriate venue.

Jonathan Meese has had solo exhibitions at the Kunsthalle St. Gallen and galleries such as Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin, Christian Nagel, Cologne, Paolo Curti & Co, Milan. His work has been included in exhibitions at Kunstverein Frankfurt, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Museum Abeiberg Monchengladbach, Kunsthalle Bielefeld, Vienna Secession, and P.S.1/MOMA.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10-6 pm. For more information or visuals, please contact Leo Koenig or Elizabeth Balogh at the gallery.

Thomas Kellein, “Jonathan Meese, or The Art of The Destroyed Form,” essay, 2000