

Press Release

Jannis Marwitz
The Raid

April 30 – June 12, 2021
Opening Friday, April 30, 11am–8pm

Extended hours for Gallery Weekend Berlin:
Saturday, May 1 & Sunday, May 2: 12–7pm

In Jannis Marwitz's *Angelus*, a figure hovers above a choppy sea, its windswept robes tantalizingly close to the open mouth of an inquisitive sea serpent. Sharing its name, which is Latin for "angel", with a catholic devotion, it's perhaps fitting that elements of this work should repeat throughout the artist's recent works. The levitating figure, seemingly pulled from a renaissance painting, appears again in *The Architect*, for instance, this time kept afloat by plumes of smoke that waft up from one corner of the painting. Grasping the same wooden baton in one hand and a ceramic pot in place of a drinking jug in the other, the second apparition of *Angelus* differs in multiple minor details to the first, suggesting that for every finished version of a painting there are countless other ways that the story could have been told.

In this new series, the concept of a raid – which suggests some kind of violent *outside* force breaching an *inside* realm – is as much a formal element as a narrative one, allowing for the introduction of tension between interior and exterior space within the canvas. This is most evident in the exhibition's titular work, which depicts one character in a green robe reclining on top of a table, while another, dressed in blue, flees an unseen attack by running underneath the too-tall piece of furniture. In exaggerating the table's dimensions, Marwitz opens up a domestic space within the landscape, which itself is restricted by the four "walls" of the canvas.

How does the narrative change when the perspective does? In these works, the same white and grey brushstrokes come to represent darkened clouds, the smoke of a burning building or steam rising from a boiling pot depending on where one looks. There are links between the works, yes, but they are formed not by a single narrative, but through a mesh of relations, which we draw by remembering an image from one painting that takes a slightly different form in another. With this technique, the melodrama invoked in a painting like *Three Geese*, is deliberately compromised by existing alongside *A Soup – a Shelf – A Compost*, which suggests that the threatening smoke in the aforementioned work may have been caused by the distinctly ordinary act of preparing dinner.

With this in mind, the smoke and clouds which pervade these paintings become not just theatrical in what they suggest, but also in how they create the illusion of depth by overlapping images like stage scenery in classical theatre. Characters, too, are almost always running in or out of frame – or if you like – on and off the stage. This is certainly the case with *Three Geese* and *3G*, paintings in which the role memory plays in this series is made even more explicit. Both works depict the same motif – a gaggle of geese and a group of women fleeing from an unseen commotion – with vastly different scales and a slight shift in colour. Compelled to stand closer or further away from each painting to get the perfect "resolution," there are alternating levels of intimacy at play when viewing each work, adding to the feeling of confusion at having been presented with the same image twice.

For the artist, these misunderstandings are a fruitful source of action. With *Selbstportrait als Bauchredner* (Self-portrait as a ventriloquist), for example, it's not clear exactly where the self-portrait resides. Does Marwitz see himself in the weathered face of the depicted captive, or should we look for his likeness in the eyes and nose painted, rather bizarrely, onto this man's stomach? In yet another repeated image in the show, this face appears again attached to the body of the titular character in *The Architect*, as well as on the same figure shown from a different angle in *A Soup – a Shelf – A Compost*. Adorned with a set of wire glasses, it seems to resemble the artist, but these items also seem to be asking: what is the self and what is a portrait of it? With their anguished, mask-like, faces, the secondary characters who populate these paintings also can't be seen as portraits in the traditional sense, but suggest the almost bird-like disguises used by actors in *commedia dell'arte*, which give the audience clues into what kind of role they are going to play in the paintings' consistently changing narratives.

Chloe Stead is a writer, critic and editor based in Berlin

Supported by:

