

SALON NOUVEAU**26 January – 21 March 2007****PRESS RELEASE**

"The demands made on the spectator by the hanging pass our understanding... Are you to hire stilts to rise to the ceiling or to get on your hands and knees to sniff anything below the dado? One can see the 19th century audience strolling, peering up, sticking their faces in pictures and falling into interrogative groups a proper distance away, pointing with a cane, perambulating again, clocking off the exhibition picture by picture... What perceptual law could justify such a barbarity?"

Brian O'Doherty, "Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space," 1976

The idea of hanging pictures frame to frame, from gallery floor to gallery ceiling, would have seemed perfectly natural to European audiences at any time between the late 17th and early 20th centuries. In larger cities such as Paris and London, salon exhibitions took place each year as a means to present the work of students or recent graduates of their respective academies, to 'instruct' and 'elevate' the nation's taste, and, more discreetly, to provide a forum for the purchase and sale of art.

Hundreds, often thousands, of paintings, drawings and prints were selected by appointed juries. Their placement within the patchwork installation was decided by committee, a process as political as it was aesthetic. A series of rules dictated the organization of each wall, based on an adherence to the traditional hierarchy of painting genres (history, portrait, still life and landscape) and a commitment to lateral symmetry. Visitors flocked to see the exhibitions in vast numbers, from Kings and Queens and their aristocrats to the lowest ranks of the urban middle-class. The salons became an important meeting place for artists, patrons and collectors, while published descriptions of their annual offerings marked the beginning of the modern occupation of the art critic.

During the last century however, such displays became increasingly rare. Indeed, so swift and complete has been the system's fall from grace that contemporary commentators find themselves questioning how it could ever have existed in the first place. Today's audience has become accustomed to a radically different way of looking at art in which works are more sparsely distributed, often within a pure, white space - "an ideal space," O'Doherty writes, "that more than any single picture, may be the archetypal image of 20th century art".

Salon Nouveau proposes a return, albeit temporary, to a time consigned to history. It rudely dispenses with the pure aesthetic of linear narrative, restoring to its place the system of elaborate viewing patterns between works of contrasting size and subject matter hung cheek-by-jowl on the full face of the gallery's walls. It empowers the viewer, inviting us to move in, step back and choose between a multiplicity of possible viewpoints in order to make visual sense of the presentation. And it should, by modernist standards, be a total disaster.

But this salon is no servant to nostalgia, and nor is it an historicist manifesto intended to trumpet the superiority of classical techniques for displaying art. Rather, it is a salon of the new - a generation often famously excluded from such events - and a challenge to practices both past and present. More than 100 works by over 50 different artists are presented. Using the cover provided by the age-old mediums of paint and pencil, they ambush the traditional genres of art-making and heed Baudelaire's call to adopt the complexity of contemporary life as their subject.



Images of royalty are thus replaced by those of celebrity, portraits of war heroes exchanged for depictions of terrorists and spies. Landscapes threaten, still lifes deceive, and religion, once rampant up and down the walls, is all but absent.

Respecting the historical rules of installation, **Salon Nouveau** invites contemporary viewers to muse upon the history of display and the sheer theatre of exhibiting art, to question the merits of the prevailing system today, and to free oneself – just briefly – from the burden of modern good taste.

List of artists: Rafal Bujnowski, Lordan Bunch, Ernesto Caivano, Marcin Cienski, Ross Chisholm, Jose Damasceno, Jay Davis, Tami Demaree, Angela Dufresne, Mark Fairnington, Samantha Fields, Cyprien Gaillard, Tim Gardner, Meghan Gerety, Margarita Gluzberg, Angelina Gualdoni, Kay Harwood, Nadia Hebson, Samuel Herbert, Colter Jacobsen, Titus Kaphar, Hannu Karjalainen, Edward Kay, Hendrik Krawen, Cary Kwok, Michael Landy, Rezi van Lankveld, Robert Lazzarini, Sea-Hyun Lee, Patte Loper, Billy Malone, Jin Meyerson, Richard Moon, Katy Moran, Dwayne Moser, John Murphy, Elizabeth Neel, Pat O'Connor, Djordje Ozbolt, Seb Patane, Drago Persic, Claire Pestaille, Ged Quinn, Alessandro Raho, Fabian Reimann, Andrew Sendor, Christoph Steinmeyer, Tim Stoner, Catherine Story, Miha Strukelj, Duncan Swann, Dolly Thompsett, Barry Thompson, Tommy White, Vicky Wright.

Curator: Jasper Sharp

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