

Pastorale

Curated by Thomas Grünfeld

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MASSIMODECARLO VSpace is delighted to present *Pastorale*, an exhibition curated by artist Thomas Grünfeld. *Pastorale* is based on ideas pertaining to arcadia, a rural place of idyllic contentment where nature and its peacefulness is idealised and enhanced. The four works in the show, by Grünfeld, Neil Jenney, Félix Vallotton and Andreas Schulze, each present a different approach to the meaning of arcadia, showing contrasting artistic understandings of the theme.

Grünfeld's work uses what he refers to as the 'artificial approach'. The panoramic work not only draws its subject from nature but also uses natural materials: quartz, marble, onyx, slate, granite and agate. The artist is guided by the inherent qualities of the stones, drawing from them similarities to other elements of nature; a certain quality of stone is transformed into a tree trunk, while others are particularly suited to the graduated surface of fluffy clouds. The scene, though true to nature in its use of materials, is an artificial representation of nature, an imagined arcadia dictated not by a real location but from the allusions drawn up in the artist's own mind.

Jenney's 'philosophical approach' in *Here and There* keeps the viewer at a distance from his arcadian scene, encouraging reflection and contemplation. The roughly applied brushstrokes Jenney uses to describe the grassy meadows drip down over the white fence that divides the scene, breaking the illusion of a depiction of a real place. While the rejection of illusion creates a mental barrier that blocks the viewer from entering the arcadian landscape, the fence itself creates a physical barrier, literally dividing the scene into the titular 'Here and There'. This dichotomy also exists beyond the confines of the artist's painted frame, which differentiates the 'here' of the gallery space from the arcadian 'there' within the frame.

In *Last Sun Rays* the sinuous trunks and branches of Vallotton's trees have a menacing anthropomorphic quality to them; this is not a peaceful and harmonious depiction of arcadia but, what Grünfeld refers to as, a 'hysterical approach'. The artist presents an expressive interpretation of a natural scene, his own vision of a heightened reality, which remains beautiful yet threatening, with grotesque shapes and an ominous hint of fiery red on the horizon.

Taking this a step further, Andreas Schulze's work features a complete transformation of nature within an unbalanced overall composition contrastingly set against calm and harmonious swathes of colour. We are unable to make out what the object or creature might be, or the seemingly indefinable space within which it resides. Even the title cannot help to define the scene and an unsettling feeling pervades through this strange, yet still calm, form of arcadia that is tinged with the element of estrangement.

Thomas Grünfeld was born in 1956 in Opladen, Germany; he lives and works in Köln.

Grünfeld's entire production is positioned between familiar and foreign, natural and unnatural, true and plausible. This is how the artist's work is placed on the crest between what appears recognizable and what is unknown. From this attitude, crosses arise between animals that do not exist and works in felt that rise to the pictorial dimension without being painted. Recent solo shows include: *HORTUS CONCLUSUS*, Château de la Boire, Solignac, France (2020); *jene*, Wentrup, Berlin (2019); *intercom*, Sammlung Philara, Düsseldorf (2017); *Homey. Opere 1986 - 2013*, Museo d'arte contemporanea Villa Croce, Genova (2014); *Thomas Grünfeld - homey, Werke von 1981 bis 2013*, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2013); *Curios & Mirabilia*, Château d'Oiron, Oiron (1993).

His work is held in the collections including: Sammlung Landesbank Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Centro Cultural de Arte Contemporanea, Mexico City and Museum Boijmans van Breuningen, Rotterdam.

Andreas Schulze was born in 1955 in Hanover, Germany; he lives and works in Köln.

Schulze's unique style simplifies everyday subjects to deny them of their banal meanings, defamiliarizing design and architectural form. His visual lexicon oscillates between gentle irony and friendly affirmation to menace and comfort.

Recent solo exhibitions have been held at: Kunsthalle Bielefeld (2018); the touring exhibition at Villa Merkel in Esslingen (2014), Kunstmuseum St. Gallen (2015) and Kunstmuseum Bonn (2014); Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt (2014). Schulze's works have been represented in important exhibitions, including Städel Museum Frankfurt (2015); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2000); Triennale di Milano (1997); Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen (1988); MoMA – Museum of Modern Art, New York (1984) and Tate Britain, London (1983). Schulze's work is held in the collections: Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Dueren; Sammlung Deutsche

Bank, Frankfurt; and Sammlung Landesbank Baden-Württemberg, Stuttgart among others.

Neil Jenney was born in 1945 in Torrington, Connecticut; he lives and works in New York.

A self-taught artist, and originally a sculptor his works of the 1960s and early 1970s were a reaction to Minimalism and Pop Art, with paintings that rejected painterly skill and were often populated by fallen trees and white fences hinting at environmental destruction.

Recent solo exhibitions include: Neil Jenney: *AMERICAN REALISM TODAY*, Gagosian, New York (2021-2022); *Neil Jenney: North America*, Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT (2007); *Neil Jenney: Sculpture 1967-68*, Alexander and Bonin, New York (2002). Jenney has been part of important institutional shows such as: *The American Century: Art and Culture 1950-2000*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2000); *Surroundings: Responses to the American Landscape*, San Jose Museum of Art, TX (1999). His works are held in collections such as: MoMA - Museum of Modern Art New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia and the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Félix Vallotton was born in 1865 in Lausanne, Switzerland; he died in Paris in 1925.

Associated with the French group Les Nabis, Vallotton is known for his paintings and black and white woodcuts. His paintings are marked by simplified details and areas of undifferentiated shading. Recent important exhibitions of Vallotton's work include the major retrospective: *Félix Vallotton: Painter of Disquiet*, Royal Academy of Art, London, UK (2019) travelling to The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, US (2019-2020).

Vallotton's work is held in the collections of: Musée d'Orsay, Paris; MoMA - Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tate, London; National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.; The Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore among others.