

Press release

MENSCHENBILD

with Stevie Dix, Lexia Hachtmann, Friedemann Heckel, Erik Schmidt, Thomas Schütte,
Jan Van Imschoot
08.03.-13.04.2024
Opening: Thursday, 7 March, 2024, 6 - 10 pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce *MENSCHENBILD*, a group exhibition featuring works by Stevie Dix, Lexia Hachtmann, Friedemann Heckel, Erik Schmidt, Thomas Schütte, and Jan Van Imschoot. The German term *Menschenbild*, which roughly translates as “conception of man” or “human image,” describes an attitude rather than a likeness. Today, the most exciting figurative work only partially draws from direct observation, opting instead to compose works “through the mind, combining memories, fantasies, and the disparate imagery that floods our vision.” *MENSCHENBILD* similarly seek to delve beneath the surface of figuration and the image to uncover shared ways of seeing.

Stevie Dix’s paintings entwine a surrealist atmosphere with emotional realism, which materializes through thick, tactile brushstrokes. Her works are propelled by a strong narrative impulse that considers the interplay between presence and absence in a lived moment. Based on photographs taken with his mobile phone, Friedemann Heckel’s watercolors capture lone individuals engaged in transitory moments of reverie: a woman gazes dreamily out of a train window, a man casts his gaze downwards while smoking, another covers his face with his hand in a gesture of stress or fatigue. The pale washy colors of these images imbue them with a mood of introspection and melancholy.

Experiences that unfold in the artist’s immediate vicinity provide the impetus for many of Erik Schmidt’s works. Whether traveling in foreign cities or immersing himself in the group dynamics of specific social milieu, Schmidt consciously adopts the role of the outsider, which offers him distinct insight into the codes, rituals, and patterns of social and physical space. His recent paintings develop in dialogue with printed photographic bases shot by the artist. Thick streaks and globs of paint extend and partially obliterate the image beneath. As Mitch Speed writes, “within Schmidt’s practice, the behavior of oil paint exudes a complexity of attributes and attitudes – a kind of personality.”

Lexia Hachtmann compares the act of painting to a stage. She considers the initial idea of a work to be only a starting point and views the canvas as a surface where characters, feelings, and moods interact. Inspired by the “non finito” technique, in which only parts of a sculpture are chiseled from the original block of material, Hachtmann creates diffuse images in which her protagonists at times seem to meld with their monochrome backgrounds. Jan Van Imschoot’s practice draws inspiration from the classical history of Western painting, film, and literature. His enigmatic paintings of villains, heroes, and misfits were foundational in the revival of figurative painting in Belgium in the 1990s. Imschoot’s works often veer between parody and exaggeration, articulating a brooding, surrealist attitude in which, as Jörg Heiser notes, “a silvery thread of blackish, absurdist humor starts to glitter.”

Thomas Schütte’s practice explores the human condition, offering a critical perspective on social, cultural, and political issues and a visually eloquent commentary on subjects like memory, loss, and the difficulty of memorializing the past. Beginning in 2010, Schütte began working with glass, which imbued his busts and faces with sense of softness and fluidity. His masklike faces possess an otherworldly, dreamlike quality at once poignant and strange. “One of the hardest things you can do,” Schütte says, “is to breathe life into dead material. And whenever I think: This head is now alive, then I go no further. Then I stop.”

Stevie Dix (b. 1990 in Genk), lives and works in Genk; **Lexia Hachtmann** (b. 1993 in Berlin), lives and works in London; **Friedemann Heckel** (b.1986 in Hamburg), lives and works in Berlin; **Jan Van Imshoot** (b.1963 in Ghent), lives and works in Noncourt-sur-le-Rongeant; **Erik Schmidt** (b. 1968 in Herford) lives and works in Berlin; **Thomas Schütte** (b.1954, Oldenburg) lives and works in Düsseldorf.