

**JEAN CHARLES BLAIS -**

22nd February - 20th April 2019

Opening: Friday, 22nd February, 7 - 9 pm



Untitled, 2018  
oil on torn posters  
227 x 261 cm / 89¾ x 102¾ in

The Buchmann Galerie is pleased to present an exhibition with new paintings by the French painter Jean Charles Blais (\*1956 in Nantes).

Jean Charles Blais emerged in the early 1980s as a member of *Figuration Libre*, an informal group of French painters revolting against the art of their time. Movements such as the *Transavanguardia* in Italy and Neo-Expressionism in Germany or street-art protagonists of downtown Manhattan all sought to take art back from the institutionalization and ivory towers that conceptual art and formalism of the previous decade had created. "I work with great trust in the processes of painting."<sup>(1)</sup>

This very process creates a tactile sensation while looking at the new paintings of Jean Charles Blais. His "canvases", layers of torn advertisement posters, reflect his techniques and experimentation. On their surfaces - damaged, cut, ripped and uneven - every visual element interacts with the surface in a way that results in spontaneous impastos and gestural bursts of color or a line, defying definitions.

After a period of intense reduction of figure to the point of abstraction around 2010, Jean-Charles Blais has returned to the figurative. At his last exhibition at Buchmann Galerie in 2016, the artist presented new works characterized by a renewed interest in the human figure, exploring its corporeality in a sculptural, column-like execution.

The works presented in the exhibition are the continuation of this new direction, and a further development of his renewed visual style. Thematically, the artist recognizes paradoxical ambivalence inherent in the understanding of the superposition itself - its "to be and not to be" - as a visual, emotional and deeply ironic discourse on the nature of the human image, and the symbolic meaning it provides.

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The new works are characterized by palette reduction - black and blue surfaces dominate the canvas, their contrast creating the strong visual and psychological effect. Compositional dynamic is achieved by vertical movements of black surfaces that emerge from the lower end of the compositions. This movement is emphasized by the lines scratched into layers of black paint which shape the figurative characters from this dark mass. The characters are static, as if captured in the somber abstraction that created them and now threatens to swallow them back to the non-real. But how real were they in the first place?

"It is in the nature of images to slip between us and reality," to quote the artist again; "We live according to cultural norms that encourage us to treat the body as an image, and this division between the self and the image results in a space that is difficult to control - it is in constant flux." (2) This division of self and the image, the main theme of the works, is conveyed in the image of a smartphone, a main iconographical motif of somber self-alienation prevalent in the cycle. The displays of smartphones serve as deeply ironic portraits. As the characters in the paintings and gouaches physically and symbolically move away, turning their backs and hiding any personal, recognizable characteristics, all that is left for the spectator is the image of a dark display from their phones - an abstract and ironic portrait of the human today.

Paintings by Jean Charles Blais have recently been exhibited at the Cabinet d'art graphique, Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, the Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain in Nice, the CAPC Musée d'art contemporain Bordeaux, and the Musée Picasso in Antibes. The artist's works can be found in major collections, including the collections of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Tate Gallery in London, the Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig in Vienna, the Carré d'Art in Nîmes, the CAPC in Bordeaux, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, and in the Musée National of Monaco.

1.) Michael Semff, "Evocation-Defence-Disappearance; on Jean-Charles Blais", in "Jean-Charles Blais 15.3.-9.6.13 Musee Picasso", Paris 2013

2.) "Too near, too far" - Jean-Charles Blais interviewed by Jean-Louis Andral, *ibid.*