

Kunsthalle Zurich Presents Laura Owens



Laura Owens, Untitled, 2000. Acryl, Öl auf Leinwand / acrylic, oil on canvas. 280.4 x 335.3 cm / 110.4 x 132 in. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, Purchased with funds provided by the Scott D.F. Spiegel Endowment Fund.

ZURICH.- Among the artists who have chosen the medium of painting as their means of expression, Laura Owens – who was born in 1970 and lives in Los Angeles – is internationally one of the most extraordinary. Since the mid-1990s she has appeared on the scene with an oeuvre that succeeds, in both a seductive as well as disconcerting way, in making painting a cognitive adventure for the viewer, by fusing the traditions of art history with those of applied art, themes of abstraction with representation, and artistic-conceptual stringency with lightness and visual fascination.

ADVERTISING

For the first time at an European venue, the Kunsthalle Zurich will present an exhibition of the artist's paintings in a large-scale survey of her works from 1994 to 2006. And for the first time ever, the artist has agreed to allow the public a glimpse into her studies on canvas that are crucial to her work and that she prepares for each of her paintings in varying formats and, in part, numerous versions. These works (approx. 75), together with the oeuvre catalogue on the works on canvas that will evolve during the exhibition, will complete this first comprehensive access to Laura Owens' work. The exhibition will then tour for its second venue in September 2006 to the Camden Arts Centre in London.

A tropical monkey reaches for a western butterfly; bears, rabbits and different species of fauna romp on an island-like piece of land, encircled by a blue that is not the sea but a daylight sky with cottony clouds through which a moon-hung, traditional night sky is wedged, against whose darkness an owl sits on a branch. Landscapes, animals, times of the day and geographical realities appear simultaneously and with equal value, as do the various painterly representations and techniques, which the artist has chosen to produce her picture: aquarelle techniques with impasto painting, loving sense for detail with gestural suggestion, illusion of perspective with flat-plane abstraction, confrontational collaging with a marquetry-like interweave of different themes, realities and technical procedures.

In this encounter with Laura Owens' paintings we meet up with every conceivable, friendly, i.e., all too familiar, picture world as a surface: whether it be the heroic formats of abstract tradition, the so-called pure experience of colour-fields and the basic forms of non-representational painting, whether it be fairytale scenes populated with fabled creatures of every imaginable cultural origin, or the decorative, adventurous flower compositions and still lifes tinged with sweetness, whether architecture, landscape and love scenes. The artist deploys all the means of picture making in the same encyclopedic way, from global high art to folk art, from the various professional fields of painting, of handicraft and the techniques of the amateur and dilettante: accomplished painting exists next to gingerbread adornment when she draws colour directly onto the canvas as though it were cake; technically perfect illusionist painting next to seemingly naïve depictions. Painting methods from different image-making processes seem inappropriately combined in one picture, and the friendliness of the motifs is always confronted with the undaunted, side-by-side alignment of her procedure along with the crass disharmony of the colour compositions.

The references Laura Owens uses for her pictures are never concealed or deployed with postmodern polemics. One could easily come up with a list of references that goes from the Renaissance, by way of Impressionism, Abstract Expressionism, Chinese and Japanese painting and their printing techniques, via the mostly anonymous masters of folk art and the arts and crafts, chiefly of female provenance, such as weaving, embroidering and ceramics, up to the current art history.

The all-embracing simultaneity and co-existing emplacement of all styles, techniques and motifs in Laura Owens' pictures generate a matter-of-fact, laid-back collective creativity, which she as an individual can use and that for her paintings signifies a liberation from representation, from the gesture of historical reference and from irony, all of which can be applied as a burden to the history of picture making.