
PROVENCE

Letter from the Editor

Saturday, November 18, 2023

Dear _____,

I landed and was welcomed back with the absolute worst weather—dreary and cold, with only small pauses between rainfall for about a week's worth of time. As such Presenhubers' **MELENCOLIA** exhibition just opened and seemed like a fitting review for the week between the temperature and the news. And who better to describe the feeling (defined as "a pensive sadness") than our Baltimore-born, Basel-based Prozac heroine, artist Cassidy Toner.

Walking through the show with her on Saturday before the protest, we were both unclear about the dimensions of sadness that were chosen and displayed; were we expecting monochromatic doom and gloom? Maybe. Like the liminal space of November itself—not quite autumn, not quite winter—the tone of the works floated on the unsteady question of what is melancholia beyond a hazy definition and into a visual meditation. Go for Joe Bradley, stay for the Melanie Ebenhoch.

Best,

Brit Barton for PROVENCE

Reviews

Cassidy Toner

MELENCOLIA at Galerie Eva Presenhuber

According to the vaguely trustworthy website we all use, Lars von Trier's apocalyptic film *Melancholia* (2011) was inspired by a depressive episode he had. Apparently, a therapist told him "Depressive people tend to act more calmly than others under heavy pressure because they already expect bad things to happen." However the current group show at Galerie Eva Presenhuber has nothing to do with this but rather Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia 1* (1514), which was the initial reference to the exhibition of the first major group show curated by the gallerist in 1988 at Galerie Grita Insam. Comically enough that's the same year Prozac entered the consumer market. "*I smile and smile and smile...*," says Justine as she sobs in the movie that this show doesn't reference.

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Upon turning the corner to enter the gallery you're immediately struck with a wall of arrangement of intimately sized paintings from Aleksandra Waliszewska. Each of these is titled *Untitled* and uncomfortably reminiscent of the embarrassingly visceral drawings we all made in high school. Of course, these are infinitely better, and the imagery ranging from horses to Hellmouths still leaves me mortified of my younger self. *Untitled* (2023) depicts a person sitting on the ground opposite a seemingly more skeletal or ghostly figure that bears a striking resemblance to Albert York's *Woman and Skeleton* (1967). However, York's painting is entrenched in the vanity of living, as the woman stares at her reflection in a hand mirror, whereas Waliszewska portrays death as seemingly fearful of life.



Installation view, *MELENCOLIA*, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zurich, 2023. Courtesy the artists and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich

The initial gallery has two Carrol Dunham drawings, also collectively known as *Untitled* (2021). Two pale green figures are seen fucking from above, like you're the mirror on a sex freak's bedroom ceiling. But I'm obsessed with the series of graphite dates scrolled across the works that reads like an obsession itself: 2/2/21, 2/3/21, 2/8/21... and on and on. As an artist, how many times have I

thought something was done only to still be at it a week later? Time is always running out.

On the opposite wall to Dunham, Josh Smith's painting *The Small Hours* (2019) hangs staring straight at the viewer. His psychedelic grim reaper, bearing a scythe in one hand and a O'Keefe-esque floral-flame in the other, is a reminder of your fleeting time. Fuck and work all you want, but some things are inescapable.



Installation view, *MELENCOLIA*, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zurich, 2023. Courtesy the artists and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich

Further on in the exhibition, painter Melanie Ebenhoch's work seems to simultaneously lampoon and embody the classically feminine personification of the melodramatic within melancholy. Her circular painting, *Going on 40* (2023), has the motif of a classical still life, while being a seductively red monochromatic painting with a protruding rounded center not unlike a nipple. But upon closer inspection, all of the fruit is in the early stages of decomposition. That level of ripeness where it's just starting to rot to just enough where you wouldn't want to eat it. It's aged out of consumption. You just missed your chance.

We know, for instance, that comedians aren't usually happy people but not everyone can pull a Bas Jan Ader and have people pay to watch you cry.

Elsewhere, Steven Shearer's *Green Hellween* (2023) is a large-scale ink and acrylic painting. Filled with colorful smoke clouds, some cartoony pumpkins, and a bunch of people I don't know having a good time. This could seem out of place but tragicomedy is a well rendered cliché. We know, for instance, that comedians aren't usually happy people but not everyone can pull a Bas Jan Ader and have people pay to watch you cry. "What's the deal with these museum ticket prices?" said in a Jerry Seinfeld voice.



Melanie Ebenhoch, *Going on 40*, 2023. Oil on acrylic resin.



Installation view, *MELENCOLIA*, Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zurich, 2023. Courtesy the artists and Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich / Vienna. Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich

But disregarding the film that isn't mentioned, or the ouroboros nature of referencing but not recalling the first exhibition one curated, *MELENCOLIA* is a group show that considers a subject that ultimately eats its own tail. And why eat it now? It's possible questions like that are beside the point in a commercial space, but to meditate on how melancholia is as romantic and varied a notion in contemporary art as it is within the history of art itself. So we can all just pretend everything I mentioned truly has a relation to the Dürer engraving and I'm not just makin' connections for the money to fill my prescription.



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MELENCOLIA at Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Maag Areal, Zürich
On through February 24, 2024

Artists include: Jean-Marie Appriou, Omar Ba, Martin Boyce, Joe Bradley, Valentin Carron, Jonathan Lyndon Chase, Verne Dawson, David Deutsch, Carroll Dunham, Melanie Ebenhoch, Koichi Enomoto, Sam Falls, Louisa Gagliardi, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Stanislava Kovalcikova, Tobias Pils, Liesl Raff, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Ugo Rondinone, Dieter Roth, Athi-Patra Ruga, Steven Shearer, Josh Smith, Uman, Aleksandra Waliszewska, and Franz West.

Cassidy Toner (b. 1992) is a Baltimore-born, Basel-based artist. Current and recent solo and duo exhibitions include at PHILIPPZOLLINGER (Zurich, 2023); All Stars (Lausanne 2023); Castiglioni (Milan, 2022); Sgomento Zurigo (2021), KunstRaumRiehen (2021); PHILIPPZOLLINGER (Zurich, 2019) and Saint Luke (Zurich, 2019). In addition, she has participated in numerous group shows, such as at Kunsthalle Zurich (currently on view); Swiss Institute (New York, 2020); Kunsthalle Basel (2019); C.Rockefeller (Dresden, 2019); Yverdon Art Center (2019); Kai Matsumiya (New York, 2019); Kunsthalle Freiburg (2018); Wallriss (Fribourg, 2018) and Kunsthau Baselland (2018). In 2018, Toner was the recipient of the Kunstcredit Award in Basel and in 2021, of the Kiefer Hablitzel Prize.