

press information

April 2007

Verne Dawson

Paintings

April 21 to May 26, 2007

Opening: Friday, April 20, 2007

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is delighted to present recent paintings by American artist Verne Dawson. This exhibition, titled *Paintings*, comprises a group of eleven new works: three medium-sized pieces done in oil on tin metal and eight pieces painted in oil on canvas ranging from medium to large format.

In his paintings, Verne Dawson seeks to forge links between 30,000 years of human and cultural history and utopian scenarios of the future. On the surface, his works are remotely reminiscent of folklorist images, as his choice of figurative motifs ostensibly follows the traditional schemes of composition used in paintings of landscapes, still lives, plants, animals, and people. On closer examination, however, his art reveals something quite different. The complexity of Dawson's imagery invites the viewer to take a step further and explore these outlandish universes.

Verne Dawson's paintings reflect a world that appears to be far removed from the reality in which we live today. They provide insight into both a prehistorical and seemingly futuristic, fantastic scenery and culture, as well as into the cosmos. They recount culturally marked (hi)stories with metaphors taken from fairytales, myths, and tribal rituals that have been passed on from one generation to another, eventually forming the cultural identity of a specific society. Other key themes present in the artist's visual worlds are the interpretation of mathematical and astronomical signs in popular folk tales, the inclusion of cyclical calendars with lunar phases and solar systems, and astrology. He takes an interest in demonstrating the parallels and the continuity in nature and civilization, in the historical evolution of mankind and society.

Verne Dawson uses his paintings as a tool to point out that prehistorical explanatory models relating to time continue to have a valid presence in our contemporary culture and reality. What interests Dawson are the methods, stories and symbols that we use to mark time.

In two of the paintings on view, we encounter "*Jack & Jill*". We find ourselves in an oddly utopian landscape: On a mountain peak in the distance, we notice a well and, standing next to it, two small figures who are hardly recognizable. In one painting, the well is the focus of attention, and we get to see what "*Jack & Jill*" are doing. "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water. Jack fell down and broke his crown, and Jill came tumbling after." The roots of this child's nursery rhyme is in France and the Jack and Jill referred to are Louis XVI who was beheaded (lost his crown) followed by his Queen Marie Antoinette (who came tumbling after). The first publication date for the lyrics of this nursery rhyme is 1795.

The painting "*Korrigan on the Run in Brittany*", displays a wide landscape with a linear tree silhouette, a stones group like in Stonehenge in the background, a vast sky, and the sun that is about to rise. Everything appears familiar to us, except for a little gnome that seems to leave the picture at a run as if he needed to find a safe place to hide from daylight. In Breton folklore, a "Korrigan" is a female fairy or dwarf-like spirit. Dwarfs and gnomes are recurrent characters in

Verne Dawson's paintings, like in the painting "*Gnome in the Vines*", assuming the part of the witness or intermediary.

Fairytales are an important element in every society's heritage. They contribute to cultural and national identification and serve as a point of reference for educative and social matters. Good and evil are always clearly determined. The tale of Little Red Riding Hood, for instance, is strongly embedded and well known in our Western culture. "*Red Riding Hood & the Wolf*" is also the title of one of Dawson's paintings, which takes the viewer into the dark depths of a scary-looking forest, where the little girl and the wolf slowly recede into the distance, with a red sun shining in a gloomy sky and modern urban skyscrapers. Despite the looming danger, which we anticipate thanks to our knowledge of the plot and which is implied by the composition of the picture, we may consider the scene, once we have a closer look, a rather harmless stroll undertaken by the two protagonists.

The scene of the painting "*Trog & Frog*" is set in a somewhat archaic valley lined by high hills and divided by a river, where a woman sitting down touches a little frog. Although in this picture, too, space and time remain undefined, we instantly think of the tale of the frog prince.

The painting entitled "*Jack*" takes a reference to the English fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk" (1807). It shows the young boy Jack climbing the plant in order to arrive in a land high up in the clouds, the home of the giant.

Looking at the large-scale painting "*Ring*", we find ourselves in the middle of a fantasy-like hippodrome or horses arena that is surrounded by a picturesque landscape. Horses gallop around a pole decorated with ribbons while one of the riders performs acrobatic feats on the back of his horse. Other people and horses participate in the event. The theme suggests a beautiful, harmonious world, and yet again, the viewer is faced with the unsettling fact that the scene may neither be dated nor located. The acrobats epitomize the wandering people and their role as popular entertainers and storytellers who, despite their lack of firm roots, have a culture of their own.

In some regions of North and Central America, most notably Mexico and Guatemala, it is believed that a new era will be ushered in with the restoration of the archaic, cyclical 13-month lunar calendar that was already known to the old Aztecs and Mayas. The artist associates this phenomenon with the painting "*Atomic Bomb*", which he depicts in the form of a poetically colorful mushroom cloud that shoots up into the beaming blue sky.

Verne Dawson was born in Meridianville, Alabama in 1961. He lives and works in New York. Most recently, his works have been shown at the Kunsthalle in Zurich, the Musée d'Art moderne in Paris, as well as the Royal Academy and the Camden Arts Centre in London. In 2005, he was represented at the Lyon Biennale, and an exhibition of his oeuvre was held at the Consortium in Dijon in the same year.

For further information, please contact Anna Caruso at Galerie Eva Presenhuber.

Opening hours:	Tuesday – Friday	12 noon – 6 pm
	Saturday	11 am – 5 pm

Upcoming exhibitions:	Peter Fischli & David Weiss, June 10 to July 28, 2007
	Dieter Roth, June 10 to July 28, 2007