MICHAEL RAEDECKER

cntrl

Opening: Saturday March 10th from 5 pm until 8 pm

A repeated motif haunts Michael Raedecker's new paintings: a tree house, set high in the forking branches of a tall and leafless tree. This is architecture at its most basic, nothing more than a pitched roof, four walls, a floor, and a long, bowing ladder that reaches down towards the ground. Try as we might, we cannot locate this structure in a particular period or place. It could have been knocked up by a 21st-Century suburban dad, in the hope that it might persuade his kids to put away their iPads, and play outside for once. Equally, it could be the work of our prehistoric ancestors, a refuge from the wolves and bears that roam the forest floor. Significantly, in two of Raedecker's canvases, the treehouse is silhouetted against a huge full moon, hung impossibly low in the sky. Might the structure's inhabitants use this celestial body as a clock of sorts, measuring the passing of their days by its waxing and waning? One thing is certain, these works are deeply concerned with time, and how it is encoded in the image. This is not simply a matter of what is depicted, but also –I think– of how.

The process behind Raedecker's new paintings is complex, a series of archaeological strata. First, the artist applies painted marks and washes to a primed canvas. Next, the canvas is coated in acrylic medium, to which he sticks a found photographic image, reproduced on paper using a standard inkjet printer. Once the medium has absorbed the ink, and the image has been transferred, he tears away the paper, and gets to work with his hallmark lengths of thread, sometimes stitching them through the canvas, sometimes suspending them in the sticky, drying medium, almost as though he were creating a low relief sculpture. What is remarkable, here, is how many different temporalities combine on the surface of a single artwork: the considered application of pigment, the immediacy (and, perhaps, post-production drag) of digital photography, the speedy and indiscriminate chemical reaction that precipitates the image transfer, and the patient labour of summoning up a motif with thread. If these works feel disorienting, even a little uncanny, this should come as no surprise. Here, time – painterly time, lens-based time, computer processing time– is determinedly out of joint.

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With their palette of deep blues, gloomy purples, and dark pinks, the paintings in Raedecker's exhibition have a crepuscular, dream-like quality. In one, a pale tree looms out of the twilight, its canopy cropped as though by a camera's viewfinder, the spaces between its branches describing a network of verticals and horizontals, reminiscent of Piet Mondriaan's early, arboreal canvases. In a second, a row of eight empty chairs await human habitation, while a series of white, glowing spheres float in the dim space behind them, perhaps a cinema's house lights, perhaps fog-dulled street lamps, perhaps UFOs. What is about to happen here? A briefing? A film screening? An alien landing? Whatever it is, it appears to be intended for only a few, select eyes. A third painting depicts a burning house, smoke rising from its rooftop in great whorls of white thread. Given its Prussian blue ground, and the abstract, seemingly photogram-derived forms that both assert and obscure its surface, this work

might be a mutant species of cyanotype, a photographic process used in the reproduction of architectural blueprints. However, while a blueprint anticipates a building's creation, this work memorialises a building's destruction. A beginning, here, is also an end.

If Raedecker's new paintings have a vague atmosphere of 80s suburban horror, like a lost Steven Spielberg adaptation of a lost novel by Stephen King, then this is only compounded by their frequently offset imagery, and the ghostly lines that run across each canvas, both of which recall the juddering, fizzing screens of a cathode ray TV. The spectre of obsolete technology also extends to the inverted words 'PLAY' and 'REC' that appear on two of these paintings, summoning up the function buttons of a home video camera, or a VCR remote. Is Raedecker engaged in an act of nostalgia, a yearning for the analogue in the digital age?

One answer seems to reside in the title of the artist's exhibition, 'cntrl', which both suggests the word 'control', absent its twin, eye-like vowels, and the 'ctrl' key on a computer keyboard. Another lies in the paintings' luminosity, which feels like it has been borrowed from the cool glow of a smartphone or tablet screen – a light that was unknown before the 21st-Century, and now each day bathes the faces of billions of people across the globe. In these works, digital information, in the form of found photographic images, is 'downloaded' on to the picture plane through the use of a gunky, almost body fluid-like medium. Born of the meeting of data and the physical world, it is impossible to imagine them being made during any other era but our own. For Raedecker, painting is not a static, historically moored enterprise, but rather one that constantly absorbs and channels new temporalities, new ways of seeing, while retaining its own inherent characteristics: materiality, the ability to address us both at a distance and in close, nose-to-the-canvas proximity, and an open-ended claim on our time. Like the treehouse, it is ancient, and something we're not done with yet.

– Tom Morton, 2018

About the artist

Michael Raedecker (1963 Amsterdam, NL) was born in Amsterdam and currently lives and works in London. He received his BA in Fashion Design from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam (1985-1990), continued his curriculum at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam (1993–1994), and at Goldsmiths College, London (1996–1997.) In 2000, Raedecker was shortlisted for the Turner Prize.

Raedecker had his first solo exhibition at Galerie Nouvelles Images in The Hague in 1998. Recent solo exhibitions include camouflage at GRIMM, Amsterdam (2016); record at Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin (2014); tour at Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2014) and Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen am Rhein (2013); volume at Hauser & Wirth, London (2012); line-up at Musée d'Art Contemporain de Nîmes, Nîmes (2010), Camden Arts Center, London (2009) and Gemeentemuseum, The Hague (2009).

His work has also been shown at Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Salzburger Kunstverein, Salzburg; Istanbul Modern, Istanbul; Knoxville Museum of Art, Knoxville; Singer Museum, Laren; Centro Nazionale per le Arti Contemporanee, Rome; Kunsthal Rotterdam, Rotterdam; Sammlung Goetz, Munich; Whitechapel Art Gallery, London; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston and Sungkok Art Museum, Seoul.