

Noi Fuhrer, Vangelis Gokas, Michael Müller, Tom Palin

curated by Giorgos Kontis

post-truth, fiction, object

CRAMA is pleased to present the group exhibition *post-truth, fiction, object* with works by Noi Fuhrer, Vangelis Gokas, Michael Müller, and Tom Palin.

In the recent times of the rise of social media, the constant flow of information, and the circulation of news well beyond traditional media, many challenges have occurred particularly in the way one may form a view towards what is happening and their surroundings. As recent examples have shown, the challenge of forming an opinion amidst the overwhelming field of information can be manipulated to the profit of various agents¹, affecting the political scenery and even the formation of movements such as QAnon and the flat-earth society. The phenomenal use of fake news has been added to these challenges, polarising populations and creating further confusion in discerning what is true; challenges that may eventually affect the way one perceives the world and reality. Today's world seems to be one deprived of certainties, as if the classical debate between positivism and individual experience and perception has been taken to another level and applied to our everyday reality. Even the use of the plural first-person pronoun in the previous sentence may be considered as a crude generalisation, as one may very well object regarding whose world and whose everyday reality the sentence refers to – and rightfully so; “my truth” or “my reality” instead of a universal one, as possible signs of the latter not being in place to accommodate views of individuals or groups of people on a just basis. The rather fragmented image of a world which until recently seemed quite cohesive is perhaps a reason for the self-reflective tendency to look on one's own way of being and living. A tendency to find a stable ground, which has in its turn been proliferated by the market and often seems to lead to hyper-individualisation phenomena; is everyone also around you into meditation, searching for authenticity and their true self?

But does such a thing exist as a singular, fundamental truth? Is there something factual and real or it is more like a matter of personal narratives and individual (or, also, collective) perceptions? How does this apply to the case of art and is there something we can learn from art in order to make sense of things? How does the challenge of discerning truth apply to artworks and objects in general? Are there true, factual objects, and are their properties true and factual as well?

What's real, and the dismantling of a central, unquestioned truth, have been important discourses in 20th century philosophy. Phenomenology, with the separation of the world and one's perception of it, has been key, as has as well been post-structuralism, its contextualising and, later on, the realisation (if I may say so) of different narratives of history and reality. Such matters question the way we see and understand the world, history, politics, matters of identity, as well as objects and the material world surrounding us. Heidegger's “turn”² has also been indicative of this,

¹ Adam Curtis's 2016 BBC documentary *HyperNormalisation* is very interesting in this regard. The Cambridge Analytica scandal is a recent example of this.

² Many small ‘turns’, actually, rather than a monumental one, but one can notice a significant difference in the way Heidegger speaks about truth and its ‘unconcealment’ in his earlier work and the way he addresses this matter in his later work.

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but, alas, I will spare you from the literary review. Graham Harman's work on Object Oriented Ontology has been a recent, very interesting study on such questions and the ontology of objects. All of the objects we experience are, for Harman, fictions, and fictions are 'integral part of human experience'³. The question that arises from the aforementioned added layers is whether they render futile one's endeavour for something profound, especially as this is often a desire for painters; a quest to reach the essence, the core of their medium - a quest to touch ground. Yet apart from any material aspect of painting, it is also a quest for the core of the whole process of it from observing and seeing, to depiction and to the process of creating a painted image. Think of the way modernist painters, for instance Paul Klee, or later painters such as Per Kirkeby, would speak about the depicting of a tree, not as a process of depicting an individual tree but instead a greater underlying essence, perhaps even of all trees⁴. Painting often takes the character of reducing - or aspiring to reduce - to forms, materials, gestures (physical yet conceptual as well). Reduce to matter; a word in place to accommodate the duality between both the materiality of a physical object and the meaning it may bear; a reducing that becomes a tremendous challenge as it entails an investigative, researchive aspect, one that in its turn entails, inevitably, an inward gaze, a questioning gaze towards one's own self. How do I look at things and how do I perceive them or perceive the world? How does this "I" function in this process and how does this whole equation work? From the outer world to the retinal, from the retinal to the hand; a process of examining the world as well as the mechanisms of doing so; a process of examining the gaze as well as the mechanisms and politics of it. This might as well be a reason for the numerous self-portraits of artists in the history of the medium and the emblematic role the artist's hand has taken in drawings, paintings, as well as in philosophy⁵.

A questioning gaze, an introverted, self-referencing or self-examining act, one of groping or outlining matters but, simultaneously, outlining the very same act of this. An outlining-physical yet conceptual as well-in duality and as an act of a mirroring between the object and the hand that depicts it. With the occasion of this exhibition, we aspire to take painting as a case study. Painting as an operation through which one may touch the matter of one's relation to the world and to themselves in both manners of depicting and perceiving, regardless actually whether any actual depiction takes place. Painting as fieldwork regarding individual perception and interpretation, in relation to objects and objectivity, regarding one's relation to the world. Painting as an act in the dark, an operation in blindfold, yet with a disarming simplicity and honesty. Moreover, painting with the awkwardness that may come along with it; the feeling of uneasiness when standing in front of a painting, of not being sure how to act in relation to it. Are we meant to 'read' the painted image, to decipher its deeper meanings? Is there a given path, a possible structural analysis starting perhaps from the 'thingly' character of the work and moving to its 'symbolic' sides or semiotic connotations⁶?

'Later, Heidegger uses *Kehre*, and sometimes *wenden-words*, for a sharp turn in our thought about being, truth, etc., and also for a turn in being itself. Plato's story of the cave initiated a 'turning [Wendung] in the determination of the essence of truth' (P, 201/251).'

Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1999, pp. 231-232

William Allen's *Ellipsis* is, also, a much illuminating work in this regard.

³ Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, A New Theory of Everything, Pelican Books UK 2018, p.34

⁴ 'Klee has never really made a study of nature, he has always drawn ideal conceptions. The drawings of trees from quite early in his life are not studies of trees but drawings of a conception of drawing of trees.'

Per Kirkeby, *Bravura*, Van Abbemuseum, 1982, p.53

⁵ Maurice Blanchot's recurrent figure of the hand that writes is an example of this.

⁶ Heidegger analyzes the thingly character of the work of art, this thingly character of the work functions as a substructure, an infrastructure as he names it, into and upon which something else, the 'proper' thing is built. These two elements function in an entity, *symbollein* is the Greek word he uses for it, in the meaning of bringing together; hence, the work is a symbol, an allegory.

Martin Heidegger, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, in *Basic Writings*, edited by David Farrell Krell, Harper Perennial, New York, 2008

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It is exactly this absence of a certain guideline and the element of uneasiness that make the seeing of a painting so interesting, and this can perhaps offer a constructive view on the way one may look at the world. An inventive gaze, that combines the mere material aspect of things, the context in which they are embedded,⁷ individual experience and memory, as well as matters of spatio-temporality; all coming together in a multi-layered reading and seeing. One that inevitably combines the multi-layered sides of one's being in the world, the sensual and cerebral aspects of us, namely feeling and thinking, yet again memory and individual perception, along though with the embeddedness in language and our greater context; the aspect of us being a part of something greater whether this may be tradition cultural context or simply time and space.

⁷ In regard to what I mention here as context, Ranciere's *Aesthetic Regime* is a very interesting approach to it. Jacques Ranciere, *The politics of Aesthetics*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2013

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With her unique approach to the medium of charcoal on paper, Tel-Aviv-born Berlin-based artist Noi Fuhrer creates large scale drawings that have a haunting presence, simultaneously sculptural and phantasmagoric. Unraveling a peculiarity within everyday moments, the scenes depicted spark a sense of narrative while drawing attention to their own glowing physicality. Noi Fuhrer studied at London's Goldsmiths and Hamburg's Hochschule für bildende Künste.

Vangelis Gokas was born in Corinth in 1969. He studied at the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the School of Fine Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (1988-1994) with professor Vangelis Dimitreas and at the School of Fine Arts of the University of Barcelona (1995-1997). In 2006 he completed his postgraduate studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts. His work has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, and can be found in museums and important private collections. Since 2011 he has been teaching as an associate professor at the Painting Studio of the School of Fine Arts of the University of Ioannina. He lives and works in Ioannina.

Vangelis Gokas appropriates images from photographs, which he reconstructs with the medium of painting. The real/virtual spaces are defined by an aura of vague mystery and allusive coverage as they are revealed to the viewer as unfamiliar, almost "romantic" landscapes, in which the observer is re-located into the created space. Even when he employs plain objects as themes, Gokas replaces the everyday gaze with a "painting" intermediation, by inviting the viewer to reconstitute the image in association with subjective experiential references.

In his work, the German-British artist Michael Müller (*1970) explores the aesthetics and visualisation of complex thought processes, which he constantly questions in terms of their sensual experience and material content. Starting from historical narratives, scientific methods, social norms as well as linguistic and numerical systems, he develops an artistic practice that constantly takes these systems and structures to their limits through variation, transformation, manipulation and fictionalising modification. The resulting deviations and irritations, as well as the resulting doubt about the existing and mistrust of unquestioned truths, create a completely independent artistic language of form that manifests itself not only in large-format paintings and drawings but also in sculptures, installations, performances and Müller's curatorial practice. Michael Müller lives and works in Berlin. From 2015 to 2018, he taught as a professor at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK). Important solo exhibitions include Städel Museum, Frankfurt a.M. (2022), Hasenheide 13, Wemhöner Collection, Berlin (2021), Jhaveri Contemporary, Mumbai (2016; 2017), Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (2016/17), KW Institute for Contemporary Art (2015/16), and Galerie Thomas Schulte (2013/2017). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions.

Tom Palin grew up in Birkenhead, Merseyside, England. He graduated from Liverpool John Moores University with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art, and from the University of Manchester with an MA in Art History. He completed a PhD in Painting at the Royal College of Art.

Tom Palin's work consists almost entirely of small scale oil paintings. These explore the boundaries between abstraction and figuration and combine an interest in the iconography of the everyday and of the romantic with a concern for the material surface of paint and the passing of time. His work appears as muted, painterly and, in narrative terms, ambiguous. He cites Maurice Utrillo as a major influence.

He has exhibited his work in a number of solo and collaborative exhibitions, including solo shows at: Leeds Arts University, (Leeds 2018), The Central Gallery (Ashton-under-Lyne, 2010), View 2 Gallery (Liverpool, 2008), Dean Clough (Halifax, 2005) and at The Atkinson Art Gallery and Library, (Southport, 2004).

Palin teaches painting at the Royal College of Art. He has written about medium specificity, abstract art and the work of Maurice Utrillo.

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Opening December 10th 2022, 4 – 8pm
the exhibition will be on view until December 17th 2022

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