

Marcin Cienski - Malerei

3.9. - 14.10.2005

Raised by Wolves

On the disturbing pictorial worlds of Marcin Cienski

by Harald Uhr / Curator Bonner Kunstverein /

Obviously, there can be no thought without mental images. **Marcin Cienski** paints such mental images and presents them for our contemplation. But often it is difficult to define what we are seeing. Initially, they latently oppose our efforts to find a coherent context. The images that **Marcin Cienski** shows to us are not new images. On the contrary, they are images we have already seen in this or similar form, and yet recognition is not easy. Even when one thinks that one has "recognised" something, a feeling of uncertainty remains. And this feeling of uncertainty is the true theme of **Cienski's** pictures. His pictures roam the border to the very threshold of perception. However, what they lack, what they appear to have lost, is precisely this aspect of motion. They are images fixed over time. Perhaps they have also been extracted from a flood of images. We are not granted insight into the larger context from which they appear to have been separated, however. The viewer is assigned the task of restoring a possible context from his own fund of mentally stored images.

Cienski's pictures hold onto something that has been fleetingly perceived, but is capable of etching itself all the more strikingly into the constant tide of inner images - as a trail of memory. Seeing is not merely a passive perceptual act, but a selective, constructing process. **Marcin Cienski's** pictures demand active participation from the viewer. They point out that our face perception is actually a hypothesis, an interpretation of the world. We do not see data and facts before our eyes; what we see is already an interpretation. And precisely this interpretation is made increasingly difficult when we have the impression that only a few additional data are needed in order to grasp the wider context. The disturbing sense of an idea creeps up on us, perhaps, but it is insufficient for true knowledge.

The artist brings images to our attention as significant and calls upon us to subject them to a reflective process. But we should also be prepared to encounter images of horror during this revue of our inner pictorial world. It is conceivable that images from a darker world within us will emerge. A different reality subsides upon things and an interim world appears. Since **Cienski's** pictures sometimes seem to penetrate the here and now from beneath a deep layer of time, there is often something dull and oppressive about them; they capture our attention in a strange spell. The artist plays with a subtle staging of the dialectics of concealment and revelation that he himself has unwrapped. The act of creating images is, for him, connected to the creation of a secret in its simultaneous revelation.

Kunststück! Was haben Sie sich dabei gedacht, Herr Cienski?

„Ich verlasse mich auf mein Unterbewusstsein, auf Träume, auf Bilder, auf Dinge, die mir wieder und wieder in den Kopf kommen. Habe ich ein Thema, so sammle ich – halb bewusst, halb intuitiv – Material, das mich inspiriert, das zu meiner Vision passt. Niemals unbewusst passiert das Malen; da brauche ich die volle Kontrolle, da muss alles stimmen: Komposition, Pinselführung, die formalen Aspekte.“

An Quellen nutze ich alles, alte Fotos, Zeichnungen, Bilder aus dem Internet, Film-Stills, Erinnerungen – wie auch hier bei ‚Trick‘. Interieur, Skulpturen und das ganze Drumherum sind ja sehr realistisch. So kennt man das. Aber diese Flamme am Flügel des Engels: Ist das ein göttlicher Fingerzeig? Frisierte Realität? Oder einfach ein billiger Special Effect, so ein ‚Trick‘ wie in einem Horrorfilm? Das Bild ist doppelbödig und sein Inhalt ganz davon abhängig, wie man es betrachtet. Zum Beispiel halte ich es für wichtig, ob der Betrachter an so etwas wie Wunder glaubt. Aber es gibt hier kein richtig oder falsch. Ich selbst denke nicht daran, Antworten zu geben. Ich stelle nur Fragen.

Die Quelle jedenfalls ist für mich immer nur Mittel zum Zweck. Mir ist egal, woher ein Motiv stammt, manchmal weiß ich es gar nicht. Egal. Wie ein DJ, der Musikbruchstücke mischt, nutze ich, was ich finde, bastele Neues daraus.

Derzeit bin ich besessen von allem, was mys-

tisch scheint, von Dingen, die wir uns nicht erklären können. Von Heiligen, von Visionären, von vermeintlichen und von wirklichen Wundern. Was haben sie mit uns Menschen von heute zu tun?

Sakrale Kunst versucht, das Unbegreifbare fassbar zu machen. Oftmals sind die Ergebnisse ja banal, oft ist diese Kunst auch viel eher Kitsch. Vielleicht brennen deshalb ja Engel, vielleicht weint deshalb eine Skulptur Tränen aus Blut? Ich finde derlei visuell attraktiv – und gleichzeitig sehr irritierend. Und indem der Betrachter selbst hinsieht, nachdenkt, nimmt er Teil am künstlerischen Prozess. Meine Arbeiten will ich deshalb nicht erklären müssen – das überlasse ich anderen.“

PROTOKOLL: JUDITH BOROWSKI



TRICK Marcin Cienski, 31, stammt aus Krakau. Das Interesse an den Arbeiten des polnischen Künstlers ist europaweit sehr groß. Die abgebildete Arbeit (2007, Öl auf Leinwand, 200 x 160 Zentimeter) kostet 15 000 €. FTD-Leser haben bei Angabe der Abo-Nummer zehn Tage Vorkaufsrecht. Galerie Binz und Krämer, Anna-Schneider-Steig 3/ Wohnwerft, 50678 Köln – Rheinauhafen, Tel. 0221/931 11 70, www.galerie-binz-kraemer.de

Lichtstreif in der Düsternis

Beunruhigende Bilder des jungen Malers Marcin Cienski

von THOMAS LINDEN

Der Geruch von Ölfarbe ist das Erste, was man wahrnimmt, wenn man derzeit die Galerie Binz & Kramer betritt. Die Bilder sind noch frisch, die der polnische Maler Marcin Cienski derzeit hier zeigt. Der 29-Jährige ist ein Meister der Dunkelheit. Feinste Nuancen zwischen Schwarz, Braun oder Grau setzt er ein, um eine Welt darzustellen, auf der ein Trauma lastet. Ohne dass sich etwas ließe, worin die Bedrohung besteht, wird sogleich deutlich: Hier gibt es ein Geheimnis, und das liegt in der Vergangenheit.

Auf den Bildern sieht man eine Wohnung, ein Lichtstreif fällt in die verdunkelten Zimmer. Hier und dort ist ein ausgestopftes Tier oder ein Geheiß über dunklen Schränken zu sehen. Eine Frau schlägt die Hände vors Gesicht. Das Haar einer älteren Frau, die wir nur als schwere dunkle Gestalt auf einem Bett sitzen sehen, steht lichterloh in Flammen.

Jedes der Bilder von Cienski enthält ein solches Sujet. Jedes zeichnet sich durch einen starken erzählerischen Gestus aus, der nach einem Betrachter verlangt. Diese Bilder wollen gelesen werden, sie warten darauf, dass man ihre dunklen Tableaus mit eigenen Assoziationen füllt. Die Infor-

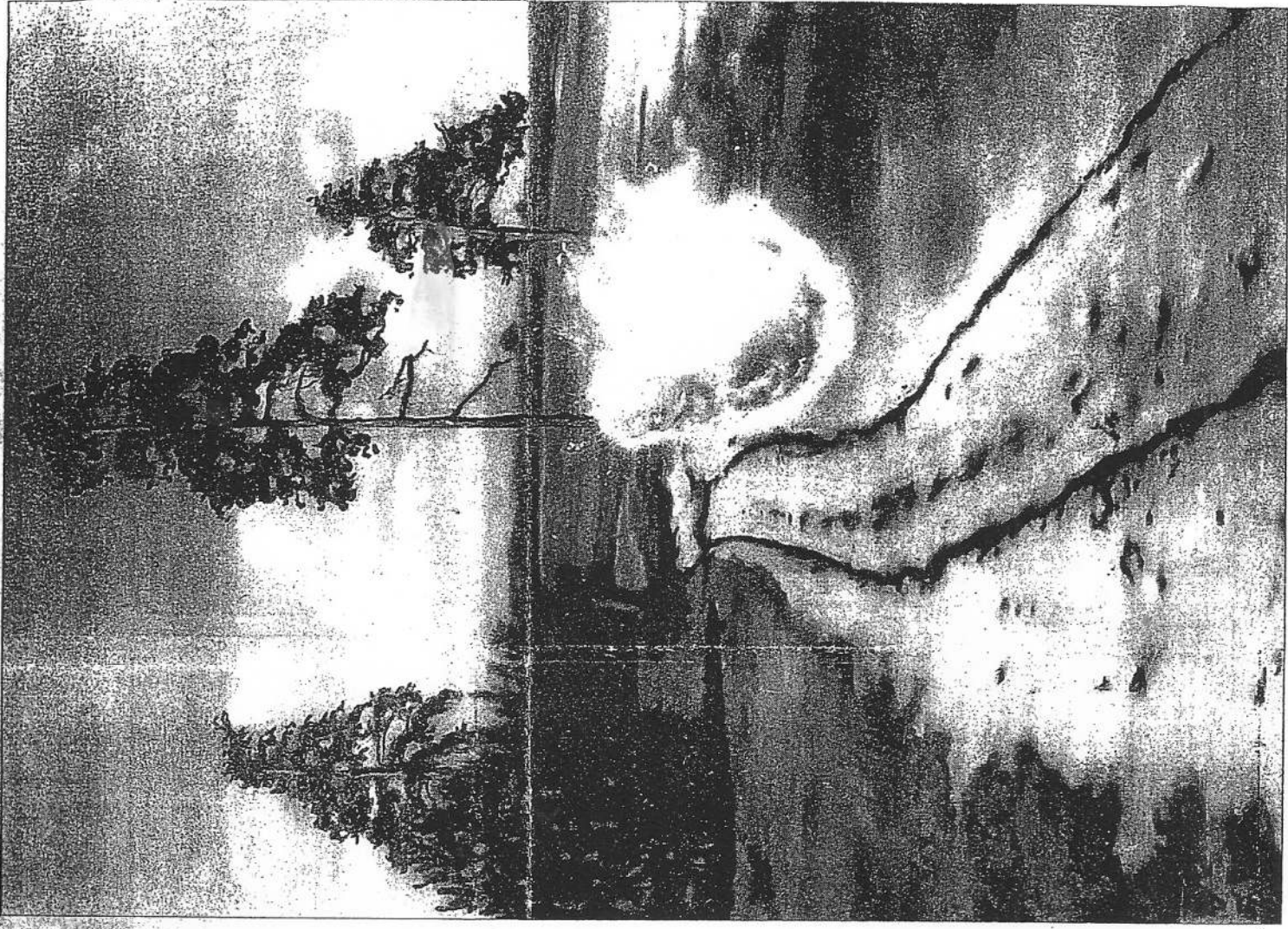
mation, dass der Künstler bei seinen Großeltern in einer solchen Wohnung aufgewachsen ist, die Großmutter einem Unglück zum Opfer fiel und der Großvater Jäger war, entschlüsseln diese Bilder auch nicht.

Das verdeutlicht ein Werkzyklus, der eine Schneelandschaft zeigt. Der Schnee ist von einem pappigen Grau, man kann sich vorstellen, wie er an den Schuhen klebt. Wölfe durchstreifen ihn, allerdings nicht als vitale Raubtiere, sondern als potenzielle Opfer. Krakau liegt unweit von Auschwitz, und die Silhouetten der Jäger mit ihren geschulten Gewehren erinnern nur zu deutlich an SS-Schergen. Die Abwesenheit von Farbe fällt sofort auf, und die Wölfe liegen hier und dort als Beute im Schnee.

Tod, Gewalt und Verzweiflung sind Themen dieser Bilder, ohne dass Marcin Cienski mit dem Effekt starker Emotionen spekuliert. Er spürt Gefühle nach, ohne sie definieren zu wollen. Das macht das Beunruhigende dieser Bilder aus. Sie arbeiten in uns weiter, sie fordern uns auf, nach eigenen Erfahrungen zu forschen.

Elsaßstr. 9, bis 21.10., Mo-Fr 14-18 Uhr, Sa 12-16 Uhr.

„Ball of Fire“ heißt diese seltsam unheimliche Arbeit von Marcin Cienski. (Foto: galerie)



DEBUT: MARCIN CIENSKI AT FRED, LONDON

by Rebecca Wilson – Saatchi Online site's editor in chief, and the show's curator

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For his first solo show in London the Polish-born, Berlin-based artist Marcin Cienski is presenting a selection new paintings. Cienski gathers his subject matters from a number of sources including old master paintings, video clips, the internet, books and tacky horror movies. Using these eclectic sources the subject matter of his paintings range from religious statues, female figures in the grip of agony or ecstasy, gloomy church interiors lit by billowing flames, banal ornaments and great waves of flames. Cienski is interested in an idea expressed by a Polish art historian as 'transpositioned reality', a reality that is somehow parallel to the reality of every day.

Reluctant to fall into narrative description, Cienski's paintings offer glimpses into what the viewer is left to imagine is a larger dramatic moment. Paintings such as *Fake* bristle with an intensity of atmosphere, the canvas seemingly holding static a moment of frenetic action, the girl is frozen in movement, swathed in sickly coloured bed clothes, the strain in her hands clearly apparent. In *Show* the surfaces of the deserted interior glisten, lit from an ominous surge of flames. For the viewer the paintings hold an immense narrative potential, Cienski, however, skilfully resists producing purely sequential narrative works and instead offers the viewer mysterious and striking imagery for the viewer to weave into their own personal stories.

For the process of creating the paintings Cienski has spoken of drawing on the subconscious and obsessive imagery that return to him. These images exorcised on the canvas in individual paintings amalgamate to create a strangely intoxicating experience for the viewer at once compelling and perturbing.

This current series relates to an academic sensibility in painting, as although the subject matter is incredibly important in the work, the composition, brushwork and the formal aspects are equally significant. The works exhibited for the first time in the U.K show a formal progression in Cienski's painterly technique. The brushwork is bolder and the surface is not as flat as in previous works. Cienski has attributed his experimentation with the simplicity of means and use of decisive brushwork to create forms to his new interest in classical nineteenth century Polish painting, for example the work of Piotr Michalowski.

Marcin Cienski was born in Krakow, Poland, where he studied at the Fine Arts Academy. He now lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Cienski was selected as one of the 30 artists in the Your Gallery @ the Guardian competition in 2006.

/16 January 2008/

mit musealem Anspruch

Fromme Andacht und verstörender Glaube

Marcin Cienski bei Binz & Krämer

Der gebürtige Krakauer nimmt sich Erscheinungen des Katholizismus vor.

Im Februar bezogen Gabriele Binz und Manfred Krämer ihre neuen Galerieräume im Rheinauhafen und genießen seither die großartige Aussicht auf den Rhein und das rechtsrheinische Ufer. Dank der Panoramafenster bilden die vorbeiziehenden Schiffe eine spektakuläre Kulisse für die ausgestellten Kunstwerke, zur Zeit Gemälde des 1976 in Krakau geborenen und in Berlin lebenden Künstlers Marcin Cienski.

Im Jahr 2005 zeigten Binz & Krämer zum ersten Mal Cienskis Malerei. In der damaligen Ausstellung präsentierte der Künstler vor allem düstere Bilder, beunruhigende Szenen in Grautönen, die in Winterlandschaften ihre Farbigkeit verloren hatten, oder wie mit dem Nacht-sichtgerät aufgenommene Geschehnisse in Grün bis Schwarz. Cienski beschäftigt sich stets jeweils nur mit einem Themenkomplex, dem er sich über längere Zeit widmet. Dabei arbeitet er sehr langsam und beansprucht mitunter mehrere Monate für ein Bild, wie zum Beispiel das große Gemälde „Trick“ in der aktuellen Präsentation, das ein Stück von einem barocken Altar zeigt und viel Wand, also leere, malerisch jedoch fein bearbeitete Fläche.

Schöpfte Cienski für seine früheren Gemälde vor allem aus der eigenen Familiengeschichte mit all den Bildern, Erinnerungen und Anekdoten, die zu einer solchen Historie dazugehören, konzentriert er sich in den neuen Bildern ganz den Erscheinungsformen christlich-katholi-

scher Frömmigkeit. Nicht nur Altäre nimmt der Maler in den Blick, sondern auch Putti, Kronleuchter, Blumengestecke, andächtig Betende oder Madonnenstatuen mit „blutenden“ Augen.

Sicher eins der faszinierendsten und gleichzeitig verstörendsten Bilder: „The Veil“, eine verschleierte Frau mit geschlossenen Augen und zum Singen oder Beten weit geöffneten Mund, der wie eine blutige Wunde klappt. Die fromme Andacht und die Inbrunst des Glaubens, wie sie gerade in Polen eine besondere Rolle spielen, werden hier einerseits in prächtiger Malweise, andererseits

Altäre und Kronleuchter, gemalt in voller Pracht

durch schnappschussartige Bildausschnitte – Cienski malt nach eigenen oder vorgefundenen Fotografien – und die Wahl des Augenblicks mit größtmöglicher Distanz gezeigt. Das gelingt bei den Bildern von Skulpturen, Altären und Menschen besser als bei den Bildern von Blumen oder Kränzen, die, für sich genommen, teils allzu sehr ins Konventionelle rutschen. Die Beschäftigung mit den Symptomen katholischer Frömmigkeit hat Cienski inzwischen abgeschlossen – man darf gespannt sein, welchem Thema der Maler sich als nächstes zuwendet (Preise 3300 bis 15 000 Euro). (BS)

Galerie Binz & Krämer, Anna-Schneider-Steig 3/Wohnwerft, bis 17. Juli, Mo.–Fr. 13–18, Sa. 12–18 Uhr.



„Die Gruppe“ – Bild aus der jüngsten Werkreihe des in Berlin lebenden Krakauers Marcin Cienski, zu sehen im Rhein-

The Dark Visions of Marcin Cienski

Polish-born, Berlin-based painter Marcin Cienski views artists as 'Demiurges' – figures who create alternate worlds without reason or justification.¹ Accordingly, his paintings play on the tension between the audience's desire to *know* versus the artist's inclination for his paintings to *be*. The artist resists offering personal explanations about his work. Instead, each painting functions as a clue; each is part of a bigger story to be completed by the viewer. He says; "The urge to paint is an intimate thing and its medium is paint not literature. A painting should be looked at and not explained by the painter. It shouldn't mean but be. It can be discussed by others but this is a whole different story."²

British writer Neal Brown described viewing Cienski's paintings as '...like coming across a Hitchcock film half-way through, at the freaky bit, without having any idea of the plot.'³ Indeed, the artist's oeuvre functions as a series of unresolved, sometimes sinister fragments. Witness *Fake* 2007. Executed in an insipid palette of butter yellow and peach, a bedridden woman lies in a state of distress. With tendons stretched and contorted, her hands strain towards her neck. Her helplessness is made all the more disturbing by the unexplained nature of the work. These ideas of physical and psychological entrapment, of figures in possession, are recurrent themes.

A recent trip to Antwerp inspired Cienski's current series, *Bad Air*, a study of the Great Plague focusing particularly on the Stoicism of victims in the face of this invisible danger. This idea of invisibility - of a threat or feeling just out of grasp - is central to Cienski's practice. Hovering on the margins of consciousness, his paintings offer inchoate suggestions of memory – both collective and personal. Ambiguity is paramount. Cienski believes that '...an artist is a medium linking the viewers with the immaterial and hidden meanings and worlds. Both the audience and the artist function on some level of subconsciousness – and neither the creation nor the perception are fully controlled and conscious.'⁴

Like film stills, Cienski's paintings hint at narrative, enacted in scenes that are often ordinary and familiar. Take his church interiors, executed in a seductive, jewel-like palette and enlivened by his virtuoso handling of light and shade. It is in the midst of these lush environments that strange things happen; a ball of flames bursts at the altar (*Show* 2007), a statuette of the Madonna weeps blood (*Head 3* 2007). In *Head* 2007, the Virgin Mary's benevolent, wearied gaze borders on freakish. With a waxy, underlit visage, one expects to see tears welling in the sculpture's eyes. Raised in a Catholic family, Cienski's paintings often question faith. Interested equally in authentic, devotional experience and the relatively modern phenomenon of sometimes kitschy faux miracles, the artist's work does not pass judgment, instead offering a series of postulations.

Cienski's work is fuelled by a desire to grasp the immaterial. Each painting he creates is a puzzle; '...Just one piece of a jigsaw puzzle. But this should be the crucial piece, the most important one. If this puzzle is well painted, a spectator can complete the whole thing with other elements they have in their minds. It is like a piece of crystal – if you have one piece you can assume that the rest looks alike. It is all in it. The whole puzzle game is there, in a single puzzle. That would be an ideal at least.'⁵

Serena Bentley

Marcin Cienski's new show at Geukens and De Vil, Antwerp. *Bad Air* exhibition dates: January 29 – 14 March 2009, Geukens and De Vil.

¹ Marcin Cienski, email correspondence with the author, 20 November 2008.

² Marcin Cienski, email correspondence with the author, 11 October 2008.

³ Neal Brown, 'Iconic Religious Art,' *The First Post* – online daily magazine, [http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/13573,arts,iconic-religious-](http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/13573,arts,iconic-religious-art)

⁴ Marcin Cienski, email correspondence with the author, 11 October 2008.

⁵ Artist's statement, Galleri s.e., http://www.galleri-se.no/artist/marcin_cienski/

Marcin Cienski - „Bad Air”

Marc RUYTERS , /<H>ART tijdschrift voor hedendaagse kunst, Benelux (en omgeving) /
hoofredactie en algemene coördinatie.

Er lijkt een geur van lijken te hangen in de Antwerpse galerie Geukens & Devil: aan de muren hangen schilderijen (olie op doek) van de Poolse, in Berlijn residerende schilder Marcin Cienski (° 1976). De meeste doeken zijn close portretten van mensen die ofwel dood zijn ofwel de kleur van de dood al in de ogen en de huid hebben.

'Bad Air' heet de tentoonstelling en ze is geïnspireerd op de grote pestplaag die in de Middeleeuwen woedde.

Toch zijn de werken meer dan dat: Cienski speelt met de spanning tussen de toeschouwer die méér wil weten en de werken zelf die mondjesmaat elementen van een verhaal aanreiken. "The urge to paint is an intimate thing and its medium is paint, not literature" zegt hij zelf.

'Witness' toont het hoofd van een oude man, waar duidelijk iets mis mee is, maar waar de onbestemdheid en het onderbewustzijn het halen op wat er te zien is. Cienski lijkt puzzelstukken te schilderen, die de kijker mentaal in elkaar moet zetten. 'Witness/Sunbath 1' toont het gelaat van een vrouw, ontsierd door een wonde die je onwillekeurig aan het pestverhaal doet denken, maar het woord 'sunbath' projecteert het werk naar andere tijden, die van de zonnebankcultuur bijvoorbeeld.

'St. Roch' toont ook weer zo'n onbestemd, verminkt mannenhoofd.

Het is heel onbehaaglijk werk, alsof je een dodenkamer binnenstapt. Maar het fascineert wel.

Marc Ruyters

H art March 05, 2009 /<H>ART is een tijdschrift voor hedendaagse kunst. Het eerste nummer van <H>ART verscheen op 26 januari 2006, als antwoord op de verschraling van de cultuurberichtgeving in de gevestigde media. /

Iconic religious art

by **Neal Brown** – has written about art for most UK and many international art magazines, including *Frieze* and *Parkett*. He is the author of numerous catalogue essays and his book *Tracey Emin* was published by Tate Publishing in 2006

There's quite a lot of disturbed, creepy painting around at the moment, of which these examples by Polish artist Marcin Cienski are some of the finest. Fearful, unexplained and mysterious occurrences are the artist's theme, so it's a bit like coming across a Hitchcock film half-way through, at the freaky bit, without having any idea of the plot. Cienski's images contain religious references here, there and everywhere, with the artist using them to create supernatural moods of strangeness and weird danger. It's all given extraordinary power by Cienski's technical prowess, and his virtuoso handling of light, shade and reflection. ■

FIRST POSTED JANUARY 21, 2008 /The First Post – online daily magazine, section Arts/

GESTURAL BECKONING

Serena Bentley

Marcin Cienski summons the intangible. Using old photographs, pictures from magazines, personal artifacts, and memories as source material, the Poland-born, Berlin-based artist creates lush, exquisitely rendered oil paintings that tap into our collective unconscious. His moody, sometimes sinister work fuses the ordinary with the unsettling. While the objects and scenes he portrays seem familiar, his paintings are nonetheless puzzling. Akin to film stills, they offer the potential for narrative, but ultimately remain unresolved. Cienski does not want viewers to be pinned down by literal interpretations. Rather, he encourages them to draw from their own experiences and interior states.

But viewers do not descend into these visions completely, for Cienski's technical execution is also significant. The jewel-like colors and lush shadows convey the marks of the maker—brush strokes are always evident. Their presence reminds viewers that they are involved in painterly acts of representation and interpretation. "I do not want paintings to imitate photography," Cienski says. "I am keen on remaining true to the medium of oil paint that enables a creation of an independent, parallel reality on canvas with painterly means."

The painter maintains that his art must not be solely intellectual. As such, Cienski's desire to tap into a "sacred source" (religious or otherwise) is important. Raised a Catholic, Cienski examines the spiritual in a way that is all encompassing—previous series involve ancient church interiors alongside kitschy weeping Madonnas. But Cienski never passes judgment. Rather than suggesting that one type of devotion is more significant than another, his work encourages quiet contemplation with its overarching

sense of ambiguity. This extends to his examinations of the living. The figures he paints are often self-contained and lost in thought. On occasion their interiority manifests itself in physical afflictions as characters appear grasped by illness, and these ideas of entrapment or an invisible threat are central to the artist's practice.

Cienski's motivations are not easily articulated. He describes his works as conduits for messages larger than himself, and maintains that "great art cannot be reasoned out. It comes from a source that cannot be described with smart words and theories." For Cienski, "a painting shouldn't mean but be." As viewers may try and fight their desire to understand, Cienski's visions of the inscrutable remain welcomingly seductive. □



Marcin Cienski, *Marshall*, 2010. Oil on canvas, 160 x 200 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Marcin Cienski. The Body and the Sacred

Personal visions, dreams and nightmares – to date, Marcin Cienski's pictorial worlds were sustained by the memories and myths of his own family history. In his most recent works, he expands on this store of themes from the individual consciousness and subconscious to include a collective dimension, turning to the various manifestations of Christian-Catholic tradition. Now, with only a few exceptions, Cienski rejects the presence of the human body in flesh and blood. Instead, his attention shifts to focus on man's artistic image, on the body in the sacred work of art. Painterly or sculptural portrayals of the saints take the place of family portraits; church interiors are depicted rather than his own apartment. To find these images, the artist no longer draws from his own memory or the history of his family in photographs, but uses art catalogues, engravings, drawings, the Internet, film stills and even his own digitally created images as a source of inspiration.

Combining candles, sculptural decor, architectural elements and a lavishly framed painting of the »Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem«, »3 Candles« presents various different elements of Baroque church design as if they were dramatic props. However, the great proximity to the motifs depicted prevents the viewer from determining his own spatial orientation. The imaginary step backwards that Cienski takes in »Chandelier« does not contribute to clarity, either, despite the enlargement of the pictorial section. The context – with a chapel-like room and a ceiling lost in the dimness above – certainly becomes visible. But the perspective assigned to the viewer hides the floor, meaning that the dark memorial on the wall with its emotive robed figure appears alarmingly large. This unusual perspective, which seems to have been constructed, and the missing painting of the Massacre of the Innocents, which ought really to be visible at the left of the background, demonstrates that the issue of architectonic exactness – the question whether this church interior actually exists in this form – is quite secondary for Cienski. He combines existing situations in a new way for some of his interiors, while others are purely artistic invention. It is the atmosphere of the painting that is decisive. In »3 Candles«, extinguished candles and shadowy sculptures challenge us to discover what constitutes this mysterious aura of sacred tranquillity. Our searching gaze therefore makes all the more effort to establish a connection between the pictorial elements, of which we often see only a part. The precise detail and painterly quality with which Cienski depicts the materiality of the reproduced painting, the candle wax and the marble of the sculptures are precisely what suggest or even promise a meaningful narrative unity. But repeatedly, the observer encounters a mere juxta-

position of depicted bodies rather than any context. The cruel process of being disembodied in the »Massacre of the Innocents in Bethlehem« meets directly with the pleasing, chubby corporeality of Baroque putti.

Most of Cienski's paintings use depictions of the human body in a religious context. The portrayals of church interiors, historical paintings, sculptures or tombs thematise the body as suffering and martyred, as enlightened, moved or enraptured, as already departed, redeemed or resurrected. Cienski's works enquire into the body – the body in the painting and that in front of the painting. Unquestioningly, when encountering works of art, we tend to employ our bodies as an automatic medium of perception. But Cienski's paintings suspend this approach, making us sensitive to the process of reception.

In the case of »Chandelier«, there is a dialogic energising between the bright, sculptured bodies in the semi-darkness of the church interior, which almost inevitably moves us to adopt the position of the observer in the empty centre of the painting. In the case of »The Group«, the viewer himself also becomes part of the events as a consequence of the painting's composition and the close-perspective depiction. For this painting, Cienski uses a section of the high altar in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Krakow, created by Veit Stoß from 1477 – 1496. The carved altar shrine shows the death and ascension of Mary, surrounded by the apostles. But the painter only depicts the mystery of the ascension in an indirect manner. Just the tips of a corona, projecting into the painting from the left, proclaim the miracle that is taking place outside of the pictorial section. Instead, the artist concentrates fully on the apostles participating in the holy event and selects a perspective from which their upper bodies, arranged in a semicircle, leave a space at their centre – almost as if they are inviting us to take a direct part in the mystery as it happens. At the same time, in this way Cienski is presenting the body to us as a central instrument of faith. It is only possible to experience the ascension of the Holy Virgin Mary through the physical reactions, the corporeal evidence of this occurrence in the apostles' gestures of astonishment and emotion. »Marching« is another work in which only the outcome and not the genesis of a spiritual experience is shown in the religious rapture of the two young women's faces as they are raised to heaven.

While these works emphasise the active role of the body in the (Christian) experience of salvation, in other paintings, Cienski stages its specific absence as the true theme of the image. In the series »Flowers«, the detailed portrayals of gravestones with sanctuary lamps and flowers represent a

pointer to the very absence of a living body. These depictions are so very realistic that one believes one can actually feel the texture of the (artificial?) flower petals, the material of the vases, the coldness of the stone or the warmth of the candles. The objects pictured in almost excessively sharp focus emphasise the fact that these materials are very much of this world. As a consequence, they can become the object of analytic observation, inviting visual research into the construction and function of mourning and funeral rituals.

The history of Christian piety is characterised by a tense relation between the body and the spirit. On the one hand, the body and the spirit are brought together in the concept of the trinity, but they are also divided by a rejection of the sensually tangible, corporeal world in favour of the spiritual world: above all, the body itself – as the tangible, sensible site of human sinfulness – is considered a slave to physical appetites and a barrier on the path to redemption. Cienski's works make clear that the body is also an essential element of Christian theology and spirituality beyond the discourse on sin and control.

This is explicitly illustrated by a phenomenon that has been growing worldwide since the early 1980s; the ›weeping‹ of water, blood and tears by statues, icons and images of the saints. Most recently, a wooden statue of the Virgin Mary at Heroldsbach in Bavaria was seen to ›weep‹ in March of this year.

The cult surrounding such weeping figures of the Virgin is a current manifestation of the notion – prevalent since the 15th century – that Mary played a part in Christ's work of redemption. Mary's sufferings represent a pendant to the sacrifice of Christ. She becomes a fellow redeemer by attending the sacrifice of her son, and ultimately – as his nurturer – she intercedes on behalf of mankind on the day of the Last Judgement. A modern, more intense immersion into the individual events of the Passion of the Virgin Mary is revealed in the physical reaction of weeping blood, however. The cult concerning Christ's martyred body is transferred to Mary as well, leading to the ultimate experience: a mystic union with the Mother of God in her suffering. Whether these are ›real‹ or ›false‹ miracles is quite secondary from the artistic point of view; Cienski's beguilingly beautiful and disturbingly drastic faces in ›Head 3‹, ›Untitled (Proof)‹ and ›Examination‹ are evidence enough that for those praying in the German village of Heroldsbach, in the Italian Civitavecchia or elsewhere, the vision of Mary's corporeal, personal presence becomes reality with a quite mediaeval iconographic force.

In Cienski's works, the human body appears as a central artistic metaphor of spiritual experience; one that he employs to take up the long tradition of religious art (not only in Poland) and simultaneously to open up historical works to our present-day experience and understanding. Besides the high art of Baroque painting and sculpture, church architecture or Gothic sculpture, he also utilises the artistic potential of rather insignificant tombs and statuettes of the Virgin. Due to the sectional quality of his pictorial worlds and the motifs' extreme close-up perspective, the viewer seems to become part of the scene. By this means, the body is depicted centrally and it becomes possible to experience it as an instrument of faith and perception in both religion and art. The paintings are not only directed towards the observing eye, therefore, but towards the entire, perceiving body.

Marcin Cienski's artistic investigation into the phenomena of religiosity presents the body as something visible, providing a basis on which to draw conclusions about what has occurred, what can no longer be seen, or is perhaps invisible.

Oliver Kornhoff