

**CHRISTIAN SCHOELER "WE HAVE GROUP CRYING SESSIONS WITH ICE CREAM"**

Exhibition: 24 August 2012 – 6 October 2012

Opening: Friday, 24 August 2012, 6 – 8 pm

Christian Schoeler (\*1978 in Hagen, Germany; lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany) doesn't simply depict the people who appear in his works, he conjures them into being. They appear before our eyes as if emerging through the back door of a renegade art history, phantoms ablaze in a tremulous, polychromatic mist. Fully sensate, this motley cast mimes their yearnings through an elegant kinesics rooted in Schoeler's deft manipulation of materials—whether oil on canvas or ink and paper. For all its expressiveness, Schoeler's practice never shades into abstraction, but remains deeply rooted in the swooning corporeality of life.

"WE HAVE GROUP CRYING SESSIONS WITH ICE CREAM," Schoeler's first solo exhibition at the Lucerne branch of Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing-Lucerne, presents three new, interrelated bodies of work: a series of paintings of the artist's friends and intimates, a cycle of works on paper, and a selection of self-portraits. Thematically, Schoeler's new paintings and drawings revolve around an exploration of gesture, understood in several complementary senses of the word. The show extends a line of artistic inquiry Schoeler initiated during his residency and subsequent solo exhibition at Galerie Urs Meile's Beijing branch in the fall of 2011.

"Paul Valéry [1871 – 1945] hit the philosophical nail on the head when he said, 'It is the skin that is the deepest,'" Schoeler once remarked, citing France's most celebrated poet, essayist and public intellectual during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Here the artist is also alluding to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who deploys Valéry's aphorism in a discussion of the ancient Stoics' belief that the surface of a body gives rise to profound, incorporeal events<sup>1</sup>—a notion borne out in Schoeler's exhibition. Reversing portraiture's Platonic promise to reveal essential truths about the subject's interior world, Schoeler focuses with great intensity on the surface of each work. In his latest paintings, the artist's companions materialize from within an aurora borealis of colors, occasionally framed by profusions of flora. All this is the result of Schoeler's frenetic, expert brushwork and the lush impastos that he uses to define his forms—that is, painting's gestural aspect.

Whether they appear to be lost in reverie or openly flirting with us, the figures starring in Schoeler's latest works encode their laments and desires within carefully rendered poses. They are easy on the eyes and often partially dressed, addressing us directly through the pantomime of their flesh. Engaging with these works, we confront a language written on the body—the tilt of a head, the bend of an elbow or wrist. This is the gesture in its literal sense, the idiom through which Schoeler's characters speak.

Schoeler's expanded notion of the gesture includes what he calls the gaze: that play of vision cast not only from the eyes of the viewer toward the work, but those glances and stares radiating from the faces Schoeler depicts. This dance of gazes is activated most dramatically by Schoeler's drawing cycle, completed over the last several months using a variety of techniques and materials, including pastel, colored pencil, and watercolor on handmade paper. The individual pieces, which vary in size from approximately 4.5 x 13 to 50 x 70 cm, have been carefully combined into thirteen "Compilations;" each grouping is presented within a large, showcase-style frame. These pulsatile, mosaic-like works animate an unfolding drama of shifting identifications that plays out across the various sightlines. "Will viewers still feel the gaze even when they've turned their backs to the work?" Schoeler asks. "Will they be able to recognize themselves, to slip through the gaze into the very subject and feel

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Logique du sens*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969), p.16. English edition: *The Logic of Sense*, Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, trans., (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) p.7. Original quotation appears in Paul Valéry, *L'Idée fixe ou Deux hommes à la mer* (Paris: Gallimard, 1933). English edition: *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry Vol. 5, Idée Fixe*, David Paul, trans., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965).

as if they were the ones being looked at?”

In discussing his new self-portraits, including a large triptych with mythical overtones, Schoeler locates his work within a lineage of maverick ancestors that includes the painters Lovis Corinth and Max Beckmann, both active members of the Berlin Secession. Corinth, who from 1900 to 1925 made an annual self-portrait, sometimes in costume or disguise, also inspires Schoeler with his expressive brushwork, while Beckmann's highly symbolic, tripartite self-portraits provide another important antecedent for works included in the show. Viewers will bring their own associations to the exhibition, ranging from Egon Schiele's wildly gazing, strenuously posed figures to Collier Schorr's contemporary drawings and photographs of young men.

The exhibition's title reveals the polymathic perversity of an artist whose work plots a surprising constellation of reference points drawn from art history, literature and popular culture. When a reporter asked the obsession-inducing English boy band One Direction how they would cope with having a number one single, perfectly coiffed teen star Zayn Malik confided: “We[’d] have group crying sessions with ice cream.” At this stage in his ascending career, one might ask Schoeler the same question.

Trapped in a state of perpetual adolescence, *1D* (as they're known) radiates a carefully packaged, bubblegum-scented sexuality that's suggestive enough for tweens, and yet safe enough for their nervous parents. Schoeler's romance with shaggy haired, puckish man-children is nothing new, evidenced in this exhibition and in several works from 2011, such as *Rembrandt as a Boy* and the two *Solomon* paintings (*untitled #044 (Solomon), 2011* and *untitled #045 (Solomon), 2011*). In this context, *1D* exemplifies the rhetoric of the gesture that so interests Schoeler—one engineered to captivate an adoring global gaze through the choreographed spontaneity and amplified innuendo that color the band's public appearances, videos and social media presence. Glancing sideways at their fresh faces, one imagines the boys of *1D* a few years from now, bare-chested and broke, sitting for Schoeler's next series of paintings. There, in Schoeler's brush strokes, the boys might search out the last traces of their innocence, watching as it shimmers to the surface of each canvas.

Text: David Spalding