

Rebekka Steiger

猫头鹰—virages nocturnes

Exhibition in Beijing: 28.8.–21.10.2018

Opening: Saturday, Sept 1, 4–6.30pm

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to announce the first solo exhibition 猫头鹰—*virages nocturnes* in China by Swiss emerging artist Rebekka Steiger (b. 1993, Zurich, Switzerland). We will present recent paintings and works on paper created during her residency at Galerie Urs Meile in Beijing. The Chinese part of the title is the mandarin word for 'owl' but literally translates into cat-headed hawk. The artist got across this word when she was looking for the historical meaning of a little bronze figure that she bought on the Beijing antiques flea market. The sculpture reminded her strongly of her often painted figures, meanwhile *virages nocturnes* is a colloquial term in French that describes a nightly stroll or being up in the night, meaning a nightly bend, turn or shift. This combination of the title coincides with what the artist wants to depict and deliver through her imageries.

Through layer-by-layer color rendering, Rebekka Steiger transforms her perception of emotions and atmosphere into mysterious and delicate art pieces, achieving unexpected visual results.

During her onsite artistic practice in Beijing 2018, Rebekka Steiger continued her usual creative style, but the change of the physical space to a foreign country also brought her more mind freedom and openness, while the failure of her accustomed navigation system opened up more possibilities. Due to regional differences, once familiar painting materials have caused unexpected “mistakes” and surprises. She also deliberately followed these surprises further along—abandoning her previous method of referencing old photographs and old books for inspiration in favor of a spontaneous approach of “action first, brush first,” thus folding the homesickness, restlessness, confusion and novelty of the outsider into her painting.

She draws on her sharper intuition, and allows her emotions to spread and fertilize freely before ultimately flowing onto the canvas. At the same time, unexpected new motifs find their way quite naturally into her paintings—a unicorn (*another tired man lays down his hand*, 2018, oil and tempera on canvas, 190 × 240 cm), a cat-eared woman (*running for the flesh (of dinosaurs and men)*, 2018, oil, tempera, pastel and gouache on canvas, 200 × 240 cm), and mysterious plants seemingly from a fantasy dreamland (*virages nocturne (under the volcano)*, 2018, oil, tempera, pastel and gouache on canvas, 240 × 200 cm).

These motifs are actually derived from the life experiences of the artist as a stranger to Beijing—the bronze owl bought from the antique market, the tall and straight black-skinned trees seen everywhere on roadside (for example *blind bend*, 2018, oil and tempera on canvas, 190 × 240 cm; *back to the roots*, 2018, oil and tempera on canvas, 50 × 70 cm). By repainting her “vocabulary of forms” over and over again, those figurative motifs go through constant metamorphosis, at times dissolving into the almost abstract (as seen in *queen*, 2018, oil and tempera on canvas, 50 × 70 cm). Some faintly recognizable shapes endow a certain rhythm to the picture, while others are ambiguous and lost in the utopian background, which leads the viewer to an unpredictable territory, the calm concealing potential danger (as seen in *night shift*, 2018, oil and tempera on canvas, 54 × 65 cm; and *lady bird*, 2018, oil, tempera and pastel on canvas, 170 × 240 cm). The “contradiction” between abstraction and representation, the expressive rendering of strong colors, as well as the presentation of figurative content without imposing a straight narrative on the viewers’ interpretation, is what not only makes the painting itself intriguing, but also unsettling.

Born 1993 in Zurich, Switzerland, Rebekka Steiger is a young emerging artist who chose painting as her artistic medium, in which she expresses herself in a virtuoso manner. Her solo exhibitions include: *Sykomore*, Kabinettausstellung, Kunstmuseum Luzerne, Lucerne, Switzerland (2017); Helen Faigle, Zurich, Switzerland (2015). Group shows include: *Extended Ground*, Galerie Urs Meile, Lucerne, Switzerland (2017); *Rebekka Steiger and Sven Egert*, Luzerner Kantonalbank, Lucerne, Switzerland (2017); *Jahresausstellung Zentralschweizer Kunstschaffenden*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, Switzerland (2016).