

“Dreams in blue: The year Philip Mueller didn’t wake up” opens at Carbon 12 in Dubai

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DUBAI.- A confrontation with the enormity of a gestural Mueller work is an introduction to what it means to be painterly. Every stroke and drip of paint layered upon itself adds an inescapable sense of space into the two-dimensional format, which for this exhibition, has moved towards evenly cut and stretched canvases. While the clean presentation does not appear to immediately mirror the figures that fill the compositions – individuals of the Black Flamingos, an imaginary gang with hedonistic appearances that belie their desire and belief of their own sophistication. Riding horses, a timeless method of transport, idolizing themselves in portraiture on surfboards (because one is not a real Black Flamingo until they have acquired portraiture status)...so assured in their refinement that they insist upon wearing masks to hide themselves from envious glares. This is the first taste of something amiss.

The Black Flamingos are outlaws free of convention, spending their time in the Alpine countryside (hence the use of surfboards as canvases, the ultimate symbol of freedom). Yet their desire to be rogue is undone by their self-imposed structuring: the uniformly worn masks, their insistence on riding horses or a hatred of the inherent arrogance of swans so strong that they can only overcome it by eating them, although, only swans below four months old, lest the taste become too “ugly”. Something is indeed amiss; observe how their ‘well-trained’ horses unseat their riders, aware of the farce. This domestication is neither real nor permanent, it is a facade, and the horse, the symbol of heroic regality, uncouthly dumps these false idols on the ground. A return to nature. A return to their true behaviour. A return to the face beneath the mask.

The exhibition acts as a dream-inspired road-movie “about freedom, excess, deconstruction, swans and Michelangelo [stylistically on whom the bodies are based],” Mueller says. Translated into form and colour, his visual lexicon involves Easter-infused tones of blues, soft pinks and greyed out whites that come together in a palette that is misleadingly soothing, as the heavily symbolic imagery is in sharp juxtaposition. Full of abstraction and texture, Mueller has recreated what you see if your eyes are closed: a blur of fleshy hues and spots of white light as beacons of safety to remind you your eyes are closed – it is just a dream! But what Mueller sees of the Black Flamingo environment is part Chaplin brothers, part Hieronymus Bosch and part post-apocalyptic. You are privy to a glimpse into a world where motorcycle gangs meet dandies, but something is still amiss.

Dreams are distorted. There is something happening just outside the frame of this amalgamation of reality and imagination. The large works describe the familiar fused with the ideal with a touch of existential awareness, a moment Mueller makes permanent when he opens his eyes. But when Mueller does awaken, there is one thing left to be said: “watch The Holy Mountain”.