

UWE WITTWER
Im Walde (In the Woods)
12 January – 23 February, 2019

After one year of cooperation Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present Uwe Wittwer's first solo exhibition at the gallery, *Im Walde (In the Woods)*. Wittwer was born in 1954 in Zurich where he still lives and works.

Wittwer's works examine the medium of painting in all its complexity but draw no hierarchical limits between oil paintings and watercolors. His subject matter follows an aesthetic logic: with technical perfection it is rendered strange, deconstructed or overlaid with parallel subjects and thus often deprived of its original meaning. The center of the exhibition is a new group of paintings which combine already familiar subjects in Wittwer's work, such as war history, memory and the reception of Old Masters, with surreal elements and a woodland landscape borrowed from Romanticism as a new circle of motifs. A series of oil paintings on canvas will be on show together with works on paper in various formats.

The title *Im Walde* may be misleading because it sounds like a quiet idyllic scene. However, there is also something hidden and eerie in the sound of these words - like a look into the murky corners of (dark) Romantic novels by Hoffmann, Eichendorff and the Brothers Grimm. In his new exhibition Wittwer plays with the intersection of beauty and evil, of appealing and disturbing elements and the fascination with the surreal. The woodland landscapes and individual groups of trees that run like a thread through Wittwer's new works break the idyll and serve as the scene for historic moments such as the Battle of the Ardennes in the first world war. With Wittwer the trees become silent observers which have repeatedly witnessed events over the years and followed them without comment.

At the start of the exhibition the eponymous painting *Im Walde* (oil on canvas, 130 x 110 cm, see invitation card) opens the view of a lonely clearing that is bordered on the left and right edges of the picture by a landscape of battered trees. More barren trees can be seen on the horizon while small, glimmering points of flame cut through what is actually a peaceful scene. The fire could have come from a recent inferno, a battle or a wildfire. At the same time the floor of the forest and the sky appear unreal in their monochrome, yellow-orange shimmering color. The delicate blue pattern, reminiscent of wallpaper in a middle-class living-room at the beginning of the 20th century, is also surreal and overlays the landscape like blooming forget-me-nots. Similar surreal elements are to be found in *Winterlandschaft (Winter Landscape)*, oil on canvas, 151 x 196 cm) where certain areas have been made unrecognizable through clouding or erasing a detail and do not open themselves to explanation. Individual sections are painted over with many layers of pastel tones, points of flame enter the foreground as floral elements and certain details of the landscape are doubled by mirroring. In *Menetekel (Writing on the Wall)*, watercolor on paper, 180 x 300 cm) it is the flowing pale-blue handwriting of a field post letter that disturbs the quite gloomy subject matter and transforms it into an almost poetic alternative imagery. Deep-red, rectangular areas of color make the landscape appear as if seen through a transparent, purple cellophane filter. In other paintings Wittwer has negative silhouettes of children appearing out of the dark, devastated scrub. Despite their ghost-like lightness they feel lively, fabulously beautiful and manifest. In *Wintertag (Winter's Day)*, oil on canvas, 170 x 195 cm) a single tree is enthroned at the center, a biplane colliding with its leafless crown. At the lower right-hand edge of the picture the scene is observed by a shadowy group of people while the snowflakes of soft oscillating brushstrokes overlay the scene like a velvet filter and make its content blurry.

One of Wittwer's special talents is to transform portentous, bleak subjects from historical theatres of war with such aesthetically appealing imagery that they arouse fascination and curiosity in the beholder. In Wittwer's new group of works this talent is coupled with his deep erudition and his feeling for many-layered levels of meaning which challenge the viewer and inspire new points of view.

Wittwer's works can be found in the collections of international institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Caldic Collection, Rotterdam; Kunsthau Zürich; Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen; Kunstmuseum Bern; Kunstmuseum Solothurn; the Bonnefantenmuseum Maastricht; the David Roberts Art Foundation, London; Musée d'art et d'histoire de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Neuenburg; Centre PasquART Biel; Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen; the Richemont Art Foundation UBS AG, the Credit Suisse Art Collection the collection of the ZKB Zürcher Kantonalbank. His works were recently to be seen in the solo shows *The Spoils of Ward* at Galerie Judin, Berlin and *Shelter* at Galerie Parafin, London (both 2018). Other exhibitions have taken place at Museum Langmatt, Baden (2017), the Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (2013), Kunstmuseum Solothurn (2013), Centre PasquArt, Biel (2012), Tate Britain, London (2011) and the Museum of Modern Art/ PS1 MoMa, New York (2006). Museum Grenchen is showing a large retrospective in spring 2019.

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