

**VALÉRIE FAVRE*****Bateau des poètes***

June 11 – July 24, 2021

Opening: June 12, 3 – 7 pm

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present *Bateau des poètes* (*Ship of Poets*), the third solo exhibition by Swiss artist Valérie Favre (\*1959 in Evilard near Biel; lives and works in Berlin) at the gallery's headquarters (Maag-Areal). The focus of the exhibition will be on three groups of works that deal respectively with questions about the cosmos, transience and transcendence, both on a philosophical as well as on a poetic level. The subjects of the individual paintings are interwoven through a profound repertoire of references from literature, art history and mythology; and at the same time, they refer to earlier groups of works by the artist. The exhibition will span two rooms of the gallery and will include new paintings in various formats.

For Favre, painting is a language of its own that initiates a dialogue of imagination and visual sensations with the viewer. Like a poet or thinker, she inserts her "words" into a fine fabric of multi-layered meanings, hinting at narratives that allow the viewer to reflect further. However, Favre's enthusiasm for the relationships between literature, art and philosophy is evident not only in her creative process. The originators of her sources of inspiration are also often visually cited in her compositions or become subject of her paintings by means of staging, as for example, in Favre's earlier groups of works on *Hugo Ball* and *De Chirico*.

The new series *Bateau des poètes*, from which the exhibition takes its name, is dedicated to a series of personalities who have influenced Favre's artistic work in different phases of her life. Each of the works depicts a nocturnal scene in a surreal universe: a firmament of countless moons and stars accompanies the voyage of a small barge gliding on the surface of a calm sea. While the night sky is rendered in a monochrome palette of sepia, midnight black or turquoise blue, the paste-like of round colour reflections on the celestial bodies are reminiscent of fireworks that make the smooth surface of the water shimmer. The image of the circle, as a graphic element, or as an allegory for the cycle of life, is a recurring motive in further works of the exhibition.

In each barque, the viewer recognises the faces - partly strikingly painted, partly printed by linocut - of well-known poets, thinkers or artists, most of whom committed suicide, such as Boris Ryzhy, Unica Zürn, Elsa Morandes, Inge Müller, Cesare Pavese and Mark Rothko; or were murdered, such as Rosa Luxemburg and Pier Paolo Pasolini (150 x 110 cm, see invitation card). But Dante Alighieri and Albert Einstein are also among the travellers. All of them are characters who reflected in a poetic, anarchic or absurd way on the meaning of life in art and science. Gliding in the barque as a group or alone, it remains unclear whether they are fleeing from something, undertaking an intellectual journey or passing into an uncertain beyond. The starting point for this series was the concept behind two earlier group of works entitled *Selbstmord* (*Suicide*, 2003 - 2013) and *Fragment* (ongoing since 2012) that Favre conflated into a new, contemplative cosmos. As a kind of in-between space, this cosmos reflects the uncertainty of our current zeitgeist in relation to themes such as immigration, the environment and sustainable perspectives.

In her group of works *Le cabinet chinois* (*Nach James Ensor*) (*The Chinese Chamber (After James Ensor)*), the artist captures an ephemeral state of transition. Inspired by the work *Skeleton Looking at Chinoiserie* by James Ensor (1860-1949), Favre creates an intimate interior, a kind of library or living room, in the centre of which, however, is not a skeleton but the seemingly surreal figure of a harlequin. Like Ensor, Favre made several versions of the scene so as not to limit herself to one point of view. Details of the furniture or the harlequin's facial features are only fleetingly hinted at. The flowing application of paint and the intense colour reflexes of yellow-gold, blue, green and purple tones are reminiscent of Pierre Bonnard's compositions. A heavy luminosity mixed with contour-less elements seems to veil another shadowy figure in the room. It is as if an afterlife would be present in the room through a metaphysical phenomenon. Through the transformation of the skeleton into a clown, however, death seems to have been defeated.

Transcendence as a philosophical-painterly moment is further explored in the work *Genesis* (130 x 250 cm). The scene reveals a view of a lush green pastoral landscape that runs into a distant horizon at the upper edge of the picture. Like an allegory of the dance of death, a female figure and a skeleton face each other in the front part of the painting. They are separated from each other by a kind of colourful fence. The figure in front turns her back to the viewer and seems to be interacting with the skeleton by gesticulating vehemently as if she were negotiating a crossing of the marked boundary. While the surroundings are reminiscent of Ferdinand Hodler's symbolically charged landscapes, the dreamlike, macabre aesthetic refers anew to James Ensor and other symbolists such as Odilon Redon.

The work occupies a certain individual position within the exhibition and, at the same time, forms a link to the monumental paintings *Schimären-Chimères/ Bleibox* (*Chimera/Lead Box*, 170 x 260 cm), *Werkstatt* (*Workshop*, 130 x 270 cm), and *La Répétition* (*The Repetition*, 170 x 260 cm), which tie in with Favre's pictorial narratives around the "theatre" as a parody of the world. Actors and props are assembled in a colourful staging, combining symbols around philosophical questions of life with literary references. The viewer abandons the position of spectator and becomes an actor himself.

*Schimären-Chimères/ Bleibox* is a direct continuation of Favre's theatrical stages in works such as *Die Hellscherin* (*The Clairvoyant*, 2014-2015) or *Crystal Palace*, 2015. In the right part of the painting, several characters have grouped around a table on which a casket is placed, alluding to the moral motif of choosing boxes from Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*. Its shimmering contents make the faces glow enigmatically. A person kneeling on the floor is dressed in an Elizabethan doublet. A red skirt without legs refers to the subject of the *Robe Rouge* (*Red Robe*), which has been a recurring motif in Favre's works since 1995. Further symbolic elements such as a bouquet of flowers and a stuffed crocodile stand as metaphors for nature packaged by humankind. On the left side of the picture, a statuesque figure is wrapped in a bodiless kimono, while the silhouettes of human shadows emerge in the dark background of the stage. A curved curtain at the right edge of the stage indicates the dynamics of a movement and its willingness to end the act soon.

The diptych *La Répétition* (*The Repetition*) shows the backstage of the scene described above. As in Favre's group of works *Am Tisch* (*At the Table*), the viewer becomes the secret observer of a theatre rehearsal. Two actors seem to be rehearsing, while a few brushstrokes behind a small passageway suggest the stage. The poses of the seated figures refer to Caravaggio's repentant Magdalena - a recurring motive in Favre's work.

In *Werkstatt* (*Workshop*), a multi-layered arrangement of props, such as a sewing machine and a small table with a kind of potter's wheel, refers to the location of the studio. It is a fictitious studio, as if set for the stage. Warm golden-brown tones and an unhinged shutter evoke the scent of wood and dust as one finds in old attics. Next to the small open window, a chicken flies in the soft sunlight. A female figure devotes herself to her handicraft, while to her right, a delicate silhouette observes the scene. As in Favre's *Lapin Univers* (*Rabbit Universe*) series, the artisan is an alter ego of herself. In the seclusion of the creative process, she finds a contemplative space of calm and fiction.

Valérie Favre's works have been exhibited internationally since the late 1980s. Solo exhibitions have been presented at the following institutions (among others): Galerie Pankow, Berlin (2020); Neue Galerie, Gladbeck (2018); Musée d'art et d'histoire, Neuchâtel (2017); Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal (2016); Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf (2016); Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg (2015); Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin (2013); Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland (2009) and Carré d'Art - Musée d'Art Contemporain, Nîmes (2009). Currently, works by the artist are on display in the travelling exhibition "Diversity/ United: Moscow. Berlin. Paris", Palais de Tokyo, Paris; State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow and Tempelhofer Flughafen, Berlin (2021). Favre has further participated in group exhibitions at Sprengel Museum, Hannover (2020-2021); MARTa Herford, Herford (2019); Aargauer Kunsthau, Aarau (2018); Albertinum, Dresden (2016); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern (2015); Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kôbe, Japan (2014); Museum of the Seam, Jerusalem (2012); Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv (2012), K21, Dusseldorf (2010) and Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (2009). In 2012, Valérie Favre was nominated for the prestigious Prix Marcel Duchamp in France. Since 2006 she has been a professor of painting at the University of the Arts in Berlin.

For further information please contact Fabio Pink: [fabio@peterkilchmann.com](mailto:fabio@peterkilchmann.com)