

ALEXANDER MELAMID meets CHRISTIAN AWE

curated by Marat Guelman

Saturday, April 29, 2023 11:30 am - 4 pm

Sunday, April 30, 2023 11:30 am - 4 pm

Art Brunch and
an exclusive tour with both artists and the curator through the exhibition.

Talk about current cultural projects and opportunities in Europe in times of the Ukraine / Russia conflict

Performance "Human. Artist. God" by Alexander Melamid

Saturday, April 29, 2023 2 pm

Zur alten Flussbadeanstalt 4, 10317 Berlin

A project of:
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As part of this year's Gallery Weekend (April 29/30, 2023), an extraordinary exhibition can be seen in the premises of the artist Christian Awe: Initiated by Marat Guelman, one of the most renowned experts on contemporary Russian art, works by artists Alexander Melamid and Christian Awe will be shown in a joint context for the first time.

Although at first glance there seems to be no connection between these two artists and their art, a closer look reveals quite a few similarities - on the one hand the obvious joy in the use of color, on the other hand also dealing with fundamental, current political and spiritual questions, which are presented and interpreted in very different ways. With Melamid predominantly in conceptual painting, Awe, on the other hand, works in an abstract and expressive way. "Berlin, especially with the new influx of refugees from Ukraine, Russia and Syria, is in a cultural sense the new New York", explains Marat Guelman. "You have to be here. We foresee a flowering of art in Berlin and want to be a part of it. Today it is a city where not only people of different nationalities, but also different understandings of art meet. In this sense, Christian Awe and Alik Melamid represent two poles: Christian believes in the power of art and Melamid believes in nothing. Christian creates a beautifully comfortable space with his work, Melamid embarrasses everyone. Art is about difference."

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Alexander Melamid

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Alexander Melamid, a Soviet-born artist who emigrated to the United States decades ago, explores the phenomenon of Van Gogh's popularity and compares Van Gogh's popularity to religion. Concluding that art is also a religion. His strategy of critiquing art in terms of spirituality led the artist to construct an identity between art and religion, and within that system he took on the role of head of religion, with Van Gogh identified as the main holy martyr. "So, art has become a new religion for the intellectual elite – and this religion is carried by the elite like a banner, like a prayer that they are ready to mutter at the Louvre, the Metropolitan Museum, the Tate Modern – wherever they come across a valuable artistic relic", the artist states.

Melamid's caustic satire is double-edged. Its second object is the present-day criticism of colonialism, in which the artist sees only a new hypostasis of colonialism, an enlightened, "all of itself" modernism, based entirely on enlightenment. And stubbornly ignoring colonial interests and modern wars. In the end, the artist's irony is a call to be adequate, to be completely honest and to see, so to speak, the flip side of Van Gogh's reproduction. Guided by this logic, Melamid proposes to move away from the diversity of art, abolishing all artists and all opuses in a variety of media too in favour of the "superproduct" and "commercial monster" that is Van Gogh and his painting.

In the series BACK TO THE FUTURE, Alexander Melamid appears in two roles at once: missionary and convert. In the role of preacher, he travels through the border region between Thailand and Myanmar (former Birma) with a Van Gogh "icon", in the role of neophyte convert he rewrites paintings by Russian artists according to the new teachings. Importantly, Melamid's works on view at BACK TO THE FUTURE are not a "Van Gogh filter", but a loving and sincere "improvement" of well-known paintings.

CHRISTIAN AWE

Whether exhibitions or oversized murals in Tokyo, Miami, Frankfurt or Palma de Mallorca - the works of the artist Christian Awe fascinate with their radiance and vitality. His paintings evoke a synesthetic atmosphere by means of an emotionally charged application of color that allows intense sensory experiences.

Above all, with his works in public space Awe frequently addresses socio-political and socially critical topics like freedom, flight, tolerance, integration and cosmopolitanism. For example, he created his giant mural "Begegnung" (encounter) in the middle of Berlin right next to the Holocaust memorial on behalf of the German state representation of Lower Saxony right at the beginning of the refugee crisis in 2016.

For his project "Art connecting cities" in Perm in 2012 he received the "Great Art Prize of Russia". In order to stimulate the dialog between Germany and Russia, in 2021 he was invited to artistically display the 220-meter-long and about three-meter-high quay wall with a painting installation as part of the Volga Festival Samara. With his exhibitions and cross over performances of music, dance and painting, over 1'000 people participated and more than 500'000 visitors attended to see his work.

With his artworks, Awe creates a moment of freedom, inspiration and joie de vivre for the viewer. His filigree handling of light, space and perspective attests a pronounced investigative mind that constantly probes the boundaries of painting. In doing so, Awe does not allow himself to be confined by predefined norms but rather blurs the boundaries between imagination and reality in

a play of light and shadow. The seemingly three-dimensional color landscapes of his current series of "water paintings" appear photo-realistic, almost as though they were printed. However, every drop of water, no matter how small, is painted by hand. The paintings glow from within and lead the viewers into a cosmos of color and light to discover their individual emotions.

Energetic streams of color and powerful splashes give the works a passionate intensity. Paired with airy, floating gestures, they merge into an intense dialog of spontaneity, experiment and artistic calculation and thus create a sensuality one can hardly escape.

ABOUT ...

ALEXANDER MELAMID

Born in Moscow in 1945, artist and performer Alexander Melamid studied at the Moscow State Art and Industry Academy, where he met Vitaly Komar, and the two became artistic partners. Komar & Melamid (K&M) are widely considered the founders of the Sots Art movement. In 1974, K&M played an important role in organizing the "Bulldozer Exhibition" in Moscow. In 1977, under pressure from the Soviet authorities, Komar and Melamid emigrated to Israel, and then relocated to the United States, settling in New York.

The works of Alexander Melamid can be found in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Tate Modern (London), the Georges National Center for Art and Culture Pompidou (Paris), the State Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow) and in various private collections and foundations around the world.

CHRISTIAN AWE

Born in Berlin in 1978, Christian Awe studied at the Berlin University of the Arts with Georg Baselitz and was a master student of Daniel Richter. In 2011 he taught as artist in residence at Princeton University.

Awe is internationally known for his works on canvas and paper, but also mainly for his large-scale murals in public space.

An exhibition in the Tretyakov Gallery (Moscow) was planned before Russia invaded Ukraine. But there is currently no dialog about this. Awe lives and works in Berlin and Palma de Mallorca, where he revived La Célula, a former sports facility - as a meeting place for creatives of all kinds and a place to connect and for creative exchange.

Christian Awe is involved in numerous social and cultural projects with a focus on education, health and integration, e.g. he built a school and a hospital in Burkina Faso (West Africa).

MARAT GUELMAN

Marat Guelman is a collector, gallerist and publicist and one of the most important curators in Russia. In 1990 he opened Russia's first private gallery, which was the center of Moscow's art life until 2000. From 2008 to 2013 he was the founder and director of the PERMM Museum of Contemporary Art in Perm, the first museum in Russia outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Since 2012 Guelman has been one of the main critics of Putin's "return to traditional values" policy. In 2014 he was forced to leave Russia. At the end of 2021, Guelman was put on the list of "foreign agents" for his Russia-critical exhibitions, making it impossible for him to enter Russia.

Marat Guelman is organizer of hundreds of exhibition and cultural events around the world. He is currently working in Berlin, where he's been setting up a new, innovative art museum, the "House of Artists", and his own gallery "Guelman und Unbekannt".