
Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Bas de Wit

In funny memory of...

Opening on June 10, 2022 from 7–10 pm

Exhibition from June 11 to August 27, 2022

The artist is present

After a long break, we are very happy to finally show works by the Dutch artist Bas de Wit again. For this exhibition de Wit has worked with different casts of antique sculptures as well as those from the time of the Renaissance and Classicism and has taken casts and modified them: distorting, stretching, compressing, coloring. As a result, we see the eponymous “funny memories of...” – distorted images, “funny memories” of what since Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the German pioneer of art history, has been described as “noble simplicity, quiet grandeur” and elevated to the perfect standard of all art. Quite in contrast to this, the reworking of what de Wit reminds us of, which sometimes goes into the grotesque, is on the one hand amusing and, on the other hand, at the same time thought-provoking: what can happen to us as human beings, what forces are we exposed to?

The exhibition itself, the course through the sculptures, reminds – in the density in which the sculptures are partly posed – of (plaster) cast collections, as one knows them from academies. Or also the presentation of the less important busts from sculpture collections: instead of emphasizing individual works, underlining them in their significance by singling them out and perhaps even by a special form of lighting, the casts / sculptures are seemingly randomly placed, laid out, grouped. As visitors, we move through a corridor formed by the objects projecting and receding. In contrast to the classical forms of presentation, however, the arrangement of the busts in the current exhibition is lively and stimulating, the sculptures are colorful: we do not experience the noble, shimmering and translucent marble (or – in the case of the cast collections – the likewise white plaster), but unusual colors that subvert visual experiences shaped by centuries, set focal points in terms of content, emphasize certain elements and transport the sculptures into an atmospherically completely different world. The ennobling functions that the plaster casts can have for the countless buyers are of course undermined in the same way. The petit bourgeois cannot emphasize his own grandeur in his garden with Bas de Wit's works, unlike with the commercial reproductions of classical sculptures.

It is also interesting how the sculptures were created: Bas de Wit – quite obviously – starts with a cast that he takes from the original (or the plaster cast of the original). Through the use of intentionally “wrongly” mixed materials, deformations occur during the drying of the preliminary cast, which distort and reduce the form. From the resulting form, a cast is again taken, which is either used as the basis for further deformation or is already the basis for Bas de Wit's work. However, de Wit cannot control the distortions and changes themselves; rather, they are chemical processes that take artistic autonomy out of his hands to a certain extent. What he can control, however, is the color of the resin, which is

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poured into the mold in several layers, starting with the lightest layer, and consolidated with fiberglass elements. So, keeping in mind the original meaning of the term "sculpture," it is not actually a sculpture in which material is taken away (a sculpture is made out of a block of stone), but rather a cast object.

Only the largest of the works in the exhibition are highlighted with their positioning. This is the case with the work *In funny memory of ... Venus de Milo*. The Hellenistic original from the 2nd century BC, an aphrodite (goddess of love, beauty and sensual desire), is in the Louvre in Paris. It is – together with the Laocoon-group and the Nike of Samothrace – among the most important works of Hellenistic art. Here and now, however, in Bas de Wit's exhibition, Venus not only is lacking arms, which are also missing from the Hellenistic original, but also no expression of sensuality. Rather, the material is crumpled, the facial expression tortured, the figure unnaturally slender in its elongation, and finally, the breasts, that stimulate(d) the imagination of millions of recipients, are missing.

The figure of a flayed man standing right at the entrance, after a sculpture by Jean-Antoine Houdon, also has this unique position. Again, it lacks not only the precision in depiction that originally served to provide an idea of the anatomy of a human being, but also the sublimity that was found not only in Houdon's work, but also in Houdon's models from antiquity and the Renaissance. Man is shown here, in Bas de Wit's work, in his sad and ruined existence.

While the sculptures refer to noble models from antiquity, the Renaissance and Classicism, the reference points for the wall reliefs are what has become known under the keywords "Crapstraction" or "Zombie Formalism": fast, abstract paintings that intentionally avoid formal, classical qualities. Only: unlike the works that Bas de Wit takes aim at, his "paintings" are created in lengthy, elaborate processes. So in these cases, too, they tend to be (ironical) imitations of the supposed models.

For more information and pictures please contact the gallery.