

**I COME FROM THE MOUNTAINS****Janis Avotins, Said Baalbaki, Duan Jianwei, Wang Yabin**

30 Aug. - 13 Oct. 2018

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to announce the group exhibition *I come from the mountains*. With artists from China, Lebanon/Germany and Latvia the exhibition will present four positions in the medium of classical painting from different geographical contexts. On the basis of established categories such as genre, portrait and landscape, the viewer is invited to approach the context-bound historical, social and sometimes very personal subjects of the individual artists such as the search for identity, flight and change. Although each artist has a very individual approach, their concerns are nevertheless linked: it is the very conscious handling of a method that has not been the center of attention for some time and the fact that their themes could not be more topical. But perhaps the artists are recognized in their home countries precisely because they know how to cultivate the tradition of their genre without losing any relevance in the process. They are New Masters whose works are creating a new public sensibility for the sophisticated aesthetics and inexhaustible potential of painting.

The Chinese artist **Wang Yabin (\*1974)**, whose work *I come from the mountains* (2017, 132 x 120 cm) gave the exhibition its title, is an acknowledged connoisseur of classical Chinese literature and his works reflect his wide reading. They contain dreamlike scenes and fantastical landscapes that seem to have their source in old folk tales. In the works in the exhibition the viewer encounters solitary wanderers in the midst of dense forests. However, the protagonists are deeply withdrawn into the background in the face of the overwhelming natural world. They are ghostly silhouettes that walk concealed paths through night-blue, earthy-yellow or fir-green forests. The sensitive brushstrokes and the extremely reserved palette make strong reference to old Chinese painting tradition, which Wang Yabin translates into his own aesthetically refined language. Sketch-like, almost graphically composed details fade into soft painted areas. The pastose brushstroke lends the scenes a haptic presence that attracts the viewer like a magnet.

Wang Yabin was born in Xinxiang, China. He lives and works in Shexian, near Shanghai. His recent exhibitions include: *Blank Cheque* at Contemporary Fine Art in Berlin, 2017, *Wandering - Wang Yabin* at Poly Art Centre in Hongkong, 2016, *Garden Splendors* at Jinji Lake Art Museum in Suzhou, 2015, *Pavilion on Memories*, Asia House London and *Lost Portrait* at Long Museum, Shanghai, 2013, *Unexpected Fragrance* at Hanhouse Art Museum in Hangzhou, China and several gallery shows in China.

The artist **Duan Jianwei (\*1961)** holds another strong position from China. His works show portraits and genre scenes that stand out for their clear contours and defined colour areas. The figure and its rural surroundings is at the center. At a time in China when many population groups are leaving the villages to move to the cities, Duan Jianwei portrays peasant people going about their simple tasks in the country such as lighting a fire or fetching water. As down-to-earth as their activities, the figures themselves are plainly and clearly constructed. It is a formal language inspired by aspects of ancient Chinese cave statues but also western Renaissance masters. In works such as *Taking a Rest*, (2016, 130 x 160 cm) or *Lighting Fire* (2015, 160 x 110 cm) the inner feelings of the protagonists are reduced to a minimum. Neither facial expression nor gesture reveal a clearly defined emotion but this does not give the scenes a less authentic effect. With their calm, solid and picture-filling presence, Duan Jianwei's figures create visual moments that are pleasing to the eye.

Duan Jianwei was born in Xuchang and lives and works in Beijing, where he is professor at the Academy of Fine Arts at Capital Normal University. His recent exhibitions include: *Oriental Peach Valley: Contemporary Chinese Art with Sources of the Traditional Oriental Aesthetics* at Werkschauhalle, Spinnerei in Leipzig, Sept. 7 – 30, 2018, *Aura and Vitality* at Platform China in Beijing, 2017, *Image - Study on the performance of Chinese contemporary oil painting* at Chinese Academy of Oil Paintings in Beijing, 2015 and many more.

The motifs in the painting of **Said Baalbaki (\*1974)** raise issues of homeland and identity. His pictorial worlds are not seldom linked to his own experiences. They concern being uprooted, not feeling at home and being torn between two worlds. In his new group of works entitled "*Mon(t) Liban*" he paints immense piles of suitcases left in an unclearly defined space and context. The compositions are strongly abstracted. His brushstroke style is lively and almost expressionistic, which gives the mountains of suitcases a humorous twist. The title of the series is a play on the French words "Mon" and "Mont" which can mean "My Lebanon" or "Mount Lebanon". The suitcase mountains thus become a symbol for flight and displacement and arouse a deep longing for home.

The artist was born in Lebanon and went to Germany during his years of study that were dominated by war at home. For many years he has been dividing his time between Beirut and Berlin. His works are in the collections of international institutions such as the Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, the British Museum, London and the Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris. Among other places his works have been presented in exhibitions at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, 2017, the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, 2016, and Staatliches Museum Ägyptischer Kunst, Munich, 2014. In 2011 an important solo show with the title *Al-Burak II* was presented at Georg-Kolbe-Museum, Berlin. The exhibition *Jussuf Abbo (1888-1953) - The Sculpture in the Bedouin Tent* just closed at Agial Art Gallery in Beirut.

The pictorial worlds of **Janis Avotins (\*1981)** are of nostalgic beauty and arouse a deep melancholy in the viewer. They are compositions in grey-black and sepia tones reminiscent of faded old photographs. The artist's works are modelled on illustrated books from the Latvian Soviet era such as city guides which he collected for years. However, in contrast to the originals conceived for propaganda purposes, space and context remain nebulous and obscure in Avotins' adaptations. His scumbling technique makes all contours blurred. A fuzzy horizon with a pale insubstantial figure shimmering in the darkness in front of it is often all that can be recognized. In other work it is faces with a veiled gaze staring into an unknown distance. Avotins' scenes have the effect of uncommented-upon trains of thought, an inner contemplation of the past of one's own country and socialist ideology. Janis Avotins was born in Riga, Latvia which is still his main place of residence. His works are in collections of international institutions such as the Sandretto Fondazione - Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Italy, the Latvian National Museum of Art, Latvia, the Bundeskunstsammlung, Bonn, and the Rubell Family Collection, Miami. His recent exhibitions include: *Šventė Vartai* Gallery, Vilnius in 2018, *Prix Jean-François Prat*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris in 2016, *Fobofilia*, Collezione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin in 2015, *Nur hier*, Kunst- und Ausstellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn in 2013 and many more gallery exhibitions.