

SPRÜTH MAGERS

John Bock

Unheil

Sprüth Magers, Berlin

November 24, 2018 - January 19, 2019

The films and mise-en-scène sculptures of John Bock are entanglements of meaning and reality. Incorporating installation, performance and film, Bock's practice is deliberately devoid of singular specific meaning; rather, his works serve to confuse the boundaries of different genres. Using theatrical, colourful material and experimental language, through the creation of various tableaux, the artist creates alchemical 'zones' in which hidden fragments of reality are revealed to the visitor. In recent years, Bock's practice has become more focused on the medium of film. Incorporating videos of his early live performances, his newer work increasingly includes complex film in which he employs various cinematic styles and techniques.

John Bock will present his new film *Unheil* (Mischief) for the first time as part of his exhibition at Sprüth Magers. Set in a medieval village, the artist returns to the Dark Ages and evokes an opaque and sinister film world. A mother is to sacrifice her sick child to the forest—she refuses, but the child disappears without a trace. A short time later, a stranger with shamanic abilities emerges from the forest and offers to help her in the search for her child. He performs mystical rituals and tricks of illusion with the help of fantastic sculptural apparatuses, drawing the woman into hallucinatory states. In her quest for knowledge, the protagonist loses herself in a web of ambiguous images that reveal partial, suspicious circumstances to her again and again. While the film initially follows a linear narrative storyline, it gradually dissolves into condensed, overlapping visual layers. John Bock deliberately uses filmic montage techniques such as dissolves, repetitions and disturbances to blur clearly definable narrative units and dissolve them into a complex network of associations.

The function of language is also gradually replaced by the power of images. In creating a vocabulary that goes beyond familiar linguistic systems, the stranger's appearance is tantamount to the destruction of familiar language. Images and barely-decipherable word structures within the film repeatedly essentially stand in a dialogical (not illustrative) relationship to one another. The result is an equivalence of word and image that seems to potentiate the other's possible horizon of meaning and makes it necessary to re-examine the parameters of one's own perception. Finally, the presented work continuously resists a straightforward reading, such that viewers also increasingly lose their own footing in the convoluted microstructure of images, meanings and linked ideas.

The film extends into the large exhibition hall with a presentation of mise-en-scène sculptures. John Bock perceives the ability to concentrate on details and individual facets of narration to be a special freedom of film as a medium. This function assumes control of the dramatic lighting as part of the "Summenmutation" (sum-mutation). While most of the sculptures remain hidden in the darkness of the room, spot lighting sets counterpoints and facilitates a semantic linking of different object components. Abstract apparatuses and illusion-machines oscillate in their role between prop and protagonist, and

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always carry a part of the narrative within them. They operate not only as mere objects, but also continue the film's plot in the exhibition space. Visitors move in a labyrinth where the meaning of the sculptures is perpetually in flux. A T-beam pervades the space in the middle of the hall, though its upper end appears lost in the darkness. This object will be incorporated into a performance by the artist at the exhibition opening. With his exhibition, John Bock creates an impenetrable, gloomy world of images and words where viewers' feel for space, time and sensory perceptions continually changes in their search for meaning hidden in the darkness.

John Bock (*Gribbohm) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions of his work have been held at the following institutions: Fondazione Prada (2018); Contemporary Austin (2017); La Panacée, Montpellier (2017); Berlinische Galerie (2017); Bundeskunsthalle Bonn (2013); Kunstverein Hamburg (2013); Städel Museum, Frankfurt (2012); Temporäre Kunsthalle Berlin (2010). Selected group exhibitions include: Montréal Museum of Fine Art (2017); Kunsthalle Rostock (2017); Marta Herford (2017); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt (2016); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (2016); Guggenheim Museum, New York (2015); 55. Venedig Biennale (2013); Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (2011) and documenta 11, Kassel (2002).

The Berlin gallery is concurrently presenting exhibitions by John Bock and Thomas Demand.

For further information and press enquiries, contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

Public reception: November 23, 6 – 9pm

Opening hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 6pm