

MAXIMILLIAN WILLIAM



Lenz Geerk | *Role Play*, 2019 | Acrylic on canvas | 15.75 x 8.27 in (40 x 21 cm). Courtesy of the artist.

ROLE PLAY

Opening reception: Wednesday 20 November 2019, 6-8pm
21 November 2019 – 24 January 2020
47 Mortimer Street, W1W 8HJ

"Give a man a mask and he'll tell you the truth." – Oscar Wilde

Throughout the history of art, artists have explored the limitlessness of using a mask, metaphorically or physically in their work, in order to amplify, conceal, animate, transform and/or disguise identities. Artists such as Goya, Beckmann and Rembrandt all played with the idea of selfhood through masquerade. The theatrical nature of painting was heightened by the work of Philip Guston, who saw himself as a movie director and actively examined this discourse, still prevalent in today's world. Whether wrestling with the history of figuration, resuscitating historical trends or discomfiting their ideas, several contemporary artists have turned to the practice to investigate issues of power, greed, identity and frustration when the boundaries between real and assumed identities are becoming more faint.

Role Play aims to investigate the work of **Philip Guston** alongside contemporary artists **Somaya Critchlow** and **Lenz Geerk** who take on a performative and theatrical role in the subject matter of their paintings. This exhibition expands on the notions of representational vocabularies of identities and the limitation of how perception is evoked. By subtly implicating themselves in their subjects through the use of "props" and dramatic poses, these artists stimulate a comically morbid storyline imbued with methods of masquerade and role-play leaving the viewer implicated in their narrative.

To coincide with the exhibition, Maximillian William will be hosting a panel discussion on the 14th of January 2020, moderated by editor, curator and writer, Amanda Renshaw, who has been working on an extensive retrospective publication on the work of Philip Guston. Joined by one of the featured artists in the exhibition, Somaya Critchlow and Claude Reich, an avid Guston collector, the talk will expand on the ideas conceived for the show, and explore the relevance and enduring legacy of influence Guston continues to have on younger generations of artists working today. This exhibition has been curated by gallery director Charlotte Eytan.

Notes to Editors:

Philip Guston (1913-1980) has carved out a singular niche in the history of art through his enigmatic figuration and personal iconography. Born in Montreal, Canada, in 1913 to Russian Jewish émigrés, Guston moved with his family to California in 1919. Apart from his brief attendance at the Otis Art Institute in Los Angeles in 1930, Guston was largely self-taught. Spanning half a century from 1930 to 1980, many of Guston's works are directly influenced by the social landscape of his time as well as his personal experiences, reactions and emotions. This immediate connection of personal experiences allowed for greater liberation in Guston's process, especially in later years. After exploring abstraction in the 1950s, Guston returned to figurative works with a strong narrative focus on ordinary objects and developed a personal vocabulary of bricks, shoes, cigarettes, books, clocks, light bulbs, which were constructed in non-hierarchical manner that captured the very essence of painting. What followed in his new surreal painterly world were hooded figures in cartoonish forms, which were partially related to the Ku Klux Klan. He explored these subjects in numerous ways – evil, comical, vulnerable, living ordinary lives, and sometimes even as self-portraits. Personal yet universally relevant, his paintings as well as his use of allegory and whimsy to confront a tumultuous social landscape continues to resonate in today's world and exert a powerful influence on younger generations of contemporary painters.

Somaya Critchlow (b. 1993) is a British artist whose figurative paintings of black women explore facets of race, sex and culture through an instinctive, stream-of-consciousness process of image making. Her works depict bold, curvaceous and self-possessed female characters, of her own creation, that simultaneously combine and subvert the culture expectations of race, gender and power in the history of portraiture. Her heroines emerge starkly against atmospheric backdrops of thinned oils evocative of classical European painting – Velázquez, Rubens et al – and David Lynch's hazy, seedy environs. Somaya was recently included in the group show 'They Gaze' at James Fuentes LLC in New York and has previously presented a solo show at Efrain Lopez Projects, Chicago (2018). She recently had a solo show at Fortnight Institute, New York and will be featured in group shows at Maximillian William, London and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. Maximillian William will present her first solo presentation in London in 2020.

Lenz Geerk (b. 1988) creates psychologically charged paintings that are removed from any specific time or place. Emphasizing his subjects in such a way as to draw out the hidden emotions of the human psyche, Geerk depicts people at the threshold of excitation and in the throes of exploration. With postures and gestures a fiction of representation, Geerk imagines how a certain fragile moment, derived from neither model nor photograph, can instead be expressed through atmosphere and body language. The nearly monochromatic palettes, only occasionally warmed by other colors, add to the aura of emotional tension. Lenz Geerk grew up with a fondness for classic modern art and comic books. He studied painting at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf (2008-2013). Recent solo exhibitions include Galeria Acappella, Naples; Galerie Valentin, Paris; Galeria Mascota, Mexico City; Gerhard Hofland Gallery, Amsterdam; The Cabin, Los Angeles, among others. Geerk resides and works in Düsseldorf.

Amanda Renshaw is a curator, writer and editor. She is currently working on a comprehensive retrospective publication on the work of Philip Guston with a substantial essay by Robert Storr and in-depth chronology compiled by Amanda. She has worked closely with Sir Anthony Caro, Albarran Cabrera, The Warhol Foundation, the Willem de Kooning Foundation, Alex Katz, Edmund de Waal, Robert Mangold, Sir Ernst Gombrich, Arne Glimcher and the estate of Agnes Martin, Joel Meyerowitz, Stephen Shore, Steve McCurry, Martin Parr, René Burri, James Nachtwey, Nan Goldin, Tomi Ungerer, Jean-Jacques Sempé, Hervé Tullet, Paul Arden and Alan Fletcher. Amanda worked at Phaidon Press for over 20 years. In her position as Editorial Director and Deputy Publisher, she performed a key role in the shaping of all Phaidon publications.

Maximillian William began as a nomadic gallery, presenting its first exhibition in 2015. Since its inception, the gallery's program has flourished through organizing and curating shows for its artists via collaborations with leading international galleries and institutions. This model facilitated the means to build a stable that reflected the gallery's ethos of supporting and presenting art being made today. Having always understood the importance of a gallery space, as well as the dialogues created and distributed within, Maximillian William opened its permanent space in the heart of London in September 2019. Forthcoming exhibitions will include the first solo show in London of Somaya Critchlow's work. Other shows will include solo exhibitions by Magda Skupinska and Coco Capitán.

Project Manager: Marcell Ibarrola

Installation Team: The Blank Space

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