VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE



Ruth Marten

Afterlife, my 20th Century

22.11.2019–01.02.2020

In 2013, the VAN DER GRINTEN GALERIE first began representing the work of artist RUTH MARTEN, a native New Yorker born in 1949. Since then, the gallery has presented and promoted her work in multiple solo and group exhibitions, as well as book publications and special editions. Last year's RUTH MARTEN retrospective '*Dream Lover*' at the LVR Max Ernst Museum in Brühl met with critical acclaim and broad public appeal. Her work has now also been successfully placed in numerous private collections, institutions and museums. All of this is a gratifying response to our efforts of recent years, confirming our high regard for the artist and her oeuvre.

In the upcoming solo show '*Afterlife, My 20th Century*' the Van der Grinten Galerie will proudly present the latest ensemble of RUTH MARTEN works, from 22 November 2019 to 01 February 2020.

At the opening of the Brühl retrospective, which the artist herself regarded as an important review of her life's work to date, RUTH MARTEN had already expressed the desire to begin

Van der Grinten Galerie
Ackerstraße 144
40233 Düsseldorf

a new work cycle. This time, the basis of her acutely observed and executed, often astonishing drawing and collage interventions would not be 18th and 19th century prints but old photographs, vintage late 19th century to late 1940s.

Viewing these new works – created between the fall of 2018 and the summer of 2019 – one is immediately struck by their relatively large format (up to 70 x 90 cm). While RUTH MARTEN is known for her body of small-format works, which play with and build on the characteristics of their print/illustration "grounding", the latest cycle represents a departure, as the artist turns her attentions to an exploration of painterly possibilities. Found historical photographs are partially painted over then copied, enlarged and again subjected to painterly interventions.

Old photos by the boxful: images of thousands of nameless souls whose unknown origins will forever remain a mystery. Betrayed by the promise of photography to stop the march of time in its tracks and surmount death, all of them are now long dead and forgotten, until RUTH MARTEN's paintbrush reawakens them to new life - an "afterlife". The artist says she wanted to emphasize the "drama". She was fascinated by the paradox between the stiff poses and touching earnestness with which the subjects stood as they left their "last testament" for posterity, firm in the faith it would last forever, and the melancholy reality of the vanitas slumbering within us all. With her interventions - covering and concealing with new colored layers, but also adding her own painted elements – RUTH MARTEN transforms the basis work. Sometimes her approach is radical, removing so much of the original visual information that almost none of it remains to be seen. Here, the many new empty patches create the space for a new beginning. The composition and focal points of the image are completely redefined, making way for fresh interpretations. A chance to be resurrected from the void, to regain significance: in portraits the faces have disappeared (*Men's Furnishings*, *Elemental*, *Oracle*…); in full body photographs whole sections of bodies and the surrounding setting, and sometimes even the whole head of the original subjects have vanished (*The Power of the Pearl*, *Blue Vessel*). What remains are people without faces, blind windows, energy-charged objects, completely disembodied hair, beards and eyes simply suspended in the nothingness of the empty page: many nods to the artist's signature obsessions, familiar from earlier works.

VAN GRINTEN
DER GALERIE

This new cycle, surprisingly different yet at once utterly typical of the RUTH MARTEN universe, once again draws the viewer into a mysterious world full of conundrums. Despite the full compliment of trademark Ruth Marten humor, here the artist also weaves a dark undertone into the poetic landscape of the works. And leaves us to ponder all the interpretive possibilities for ourselves.

Van der Grinten Galerie
Ackerstraße 144
40233 Düsseldorf