



HARDING MEYER



Harding Meyer's studio

HARDING MEYER

NEW PAINTINGS

**ODON
WAGNER**
CONTEMPORARY

ALL SEEING, ALL KNOWING: OMNISCIENCE WITHIN THE WORK OF HARDING MEYER

By Meghan O'Callaghan & Danielle Park Wiseman

"The eye, the window of the soul, is the chief means whereby the understanding can most fully and abundantly appreciate the infinite works of Nature."

Leonardo da Vinci

The belief that light emanates from the eye acting as the "window to the soul" has been historically explored in philosophy, religion, and art. Leonardo da Vinci's cerebral explorations were performed to prove that the soul does, in fact, reside in the human skull and is only viewable through the pupil. Reverberations of this concept can be seen in this artist's painted eyes—namely those of his female portraits—whose iconic depictions have long entranced his viewers. In examining this reoccurring ocular theory, one cannot deny its resonance in the work of Brazilian born artist Harding Meyer, whose latest series references the agency of the *gaze*, the history of portraiture, and the mass consumption of images in today's technological world. Through Meyer's academic training at the State Academy of Fine Arts (Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Kunst) in Karlsruhe, Germany and his understanding of the zeitgeist, this tangible series offers a bevy of striking female portraits whose confident head shots are intimate and consuming as they gaze upon us.

As a natural human behaviour, our pupils dilate and contract based on the amount of light and sensory input that comes into the eye, known as the *pupillary light response*. The climax in each of Meyer's works is found in the meeting of the iris and the pupil as they command the viewer's attention in a way that brings our awareness to how we, in truth, are being surveyed. This is powerfully captured in *Image 3* whose striking eyes come to a pinnacle; the narrowed achromatic pupil is contrasted against the shimmering wealth of green and white tonalities of the iris. Neurophysicist Wol Einhäuser-Treyer theorizes that "pupil dilation can betray an individual's decision before it is openly revealed", demonstrating that dilation is a sensory response to cognitive and emotional

stimuli. As we recognize the narrowed pupils throughout Meyer's series, notably shown in *Images 5 & 7*, the case of the artist's hauntingly beautiful portraits is twofold: we come to realize that we are being surveyed and that the figure has not yet formed an opinion of the viewer.

It was John Berger who in his seminal essay *The Ways of Seeing* broke down the basic dialectic inherent in female representation, positing "Men look at women, while women watch themselves being looked at." Dramatically defiant to Berger's theory are the eyes portrayed in Meyer's portraits. They are not diverted and the demanding presence of each figure's frontal and symmetrical composition brings our awareness to the way in which we, the spectators, are concomitantly being observed. The women portrayed in this exhibition, albeit classically beautiful, nonetheless reject the traditional three-quarter turned pose, the head is not angled away from the viewer, and the eyes are not downcast. Coyness is done away with as these women meet the viewer's gaze, *en face*.

Nowhere is this more prevalent than in *Images 1 & 2* where the monumental size of the canvas allows for the eye-width to measure over three feet. It is unavoidable to meet their self-assured observance, encouraging us to converse with each figure. This subversive energy brought to us at a massive scale differentiates the meaning between *seeing* and the act of *looking*. "To see" is to passively observe and recognize the world around us in an arbitrary way, whereas "to look" is to make a conscious decision and evaluate the perceived object. This dynamic can only be conceived when the object understands its perception by the assessor. Not only do we *look* at Meyer's paintings to critique each face,

but their larger-than-life size and their contemplative facial expressions place the power of observation within their gaze.

While we in our digital age are constantly consumed by a high tide of images through the internet and all that it encompasses, we tend to scroll endlessly as mindless observers. Meyer resists this temptation. He is neither numb nor passive in his consumption of mass media. Rather he is searching for and collecting images as a way to create something new, his muse. At the beginning of his process, Meyer builds up several portraits onto one canvas (some works up to fifteen layers), while stripping away at the identity inherent in each of the original photographs. His play of fusing facial elements from several different sources results in a renaissance of a new face that we instinctually attempt to identify. It was French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre who postulated that the depicted figure can only be made whole in the consciousness of the viewer, meaning a portrait is incomplete until the viewer completes it in their mind. As we naturally yearn to identify with the resemblances found in each of Meyer's portraits, we realize that this requires active *looking* in order to reconstruct a new being in our own consciousness.

In Leonardo Da Vinci's Treatise on Painting, he noted that "women should be represented with demure actions... their heads lowered and inclined to one side." Contrary to this statement, Meyer gives power to women by mimicking the colossal symmetry and sheer frontality of their face that pervades male portraiture and religious icons, evocatively visible in *Image 5*. Much like Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portrait* from 1500, where the German artist sent shockwaves throughout Europe dressing himself in the guise of Christ, Meyer, too, appropriates this holy iconography and compositional structure. In place of the icon's power derived from indexical recognition, Meyer has superseded this familiarity by presenting us with an anonymous figure that has proven her own assertive agency without being identified. The thought provoking and confident stare of Durer's *Self-Portrait* relays his strong sense of self, which is duplicated in Meyer's women whose conscious eyes

are unmistakably related. This is explicitly rendered in *Image 8* where the shadow cast upon the right side of her face emphasizes the gravitational centre of the painting, the right eye: a site where her intellect and soul is brought to life. The importance of this eye is aesthetically demarcated by the artist who has literally framed this area with remnants of wet paint pulled across the canvas, endemic of Meyer's mature painterly style. There is this desire for connectivity, much like celebrity appeal, to uncover the authentic identity beneath Meyer's performance. While the artist provides us with an endless parade of close-ups, we naturally find an intimate and personal relationship to the individual works.

The innate impulse to breathe life into one's artistic creations has been presented to us since classical mythology. Beginning with the Greek sculptor Pygmalion, the artist sought to have his inanimate muse, Galatea, brought to life. This desire to imbue the unparalleled beauty of his sculpture with a breathing identity prevails unto our contemporary existence, living in Meyer's artistic practice. His figures endure outside of time and space with abstracted, tonal backgrounds that are empty, but not blank. They come forth from the textured depths of the artist's conscience as he portrays his beautiful creations with agency and vitality. There ultimately lies an unbroken connection in this series between the artist, sitter, and viewer, as we collectively converse beyond the planar reality vis-à-vis our eyes.

"The face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter"

Cicero (106-43 B.C.)



1 UNTITLED 46 oil on canvas, 75 x 98 in. / 190 x 250 cm





2 UNTITLED 47 oil on canvas, 75 x 98 in. / 190 x 250 cm



3 UNTITLED 34 oil on canvas, 67 x 87 in. / 170 x 220 cm





4 UNTITLED 10 oil on canvas, 67 x 87 in. / 170 x 220 cm





5 UNTITLED 12 oil on canvas, 59 x 75 in. / 150 x 190 cm





6 UNTITLED 43 oil on canvas, 47 x 59 in. / 120 x 150 cm



7 UNTITLED 44 oil on canvas, 35 x 43 in. / 90 x 110 cm



8 UNTITLED 45 oil on canvas, 43 x 43 in. / 110 x 110 cm



9 UNTITLED 35 oil on canvas, 35 x 43 in. / 190 x 110 cm



10 UNTITLED 9 oil on canvas, 35 x 35 in. / 90 x 90 cm



HARDING MEYER

Harding Meyer was born in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1964. He studied at the Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste, Karlsruhe, Germany from 1987-1993. He currently lives and works in Berlin and Karlsruhe.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2018 Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 2017 Galerie Jarmuschek+Partner, Berlin, Germany
Galerie Frey, Vienna, Austria
- 2016 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2015 Odon Wagner Gallery, Toronto
- 2014 Galerie Frey, Vienna Austria
Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2013 Galerie Ilka Klose, Würzburg, Germany
KATARA Doha, Qatar
- 2012 Galerie Frey, Salzburg, Germany
Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
Galerie Ross + Ross, Stuttgart, Germany
- 2011 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
Galerie Frey, Vienna, Austria
Kunstverein Emsdetten, Germany
Galerie Lausberg, Toronto
- 2010 Galerie Jarmuschek und Partner, Berlin, Germany
- 2009 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
Volta6, Basel Galerie Jarmuschek + Partner
- 2008 Galerie Lausberg, Toronto
Galerie Jarmuschek und Partner, Berlin, Germany
Gallerie Verrengia, Salerno, Italy
- 2007 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
Galerie Frey, Wien, Austria
Galerie Lausberg, Toronto
- 2006 Galerie Jarmuschek und Partner, Berlin, Germany
Roberta Lietti Arte Contemporanea, Como, Italy
- 2005 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2004 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2003 James Coleman Gallery, London, England
- 2002 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
Galerie Jahn, Landshut, Germany
- 2001 Kunstraum 34, Stuttgart, Germany
- 2000 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
Kunstverein Karlsruhe, Germany

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Musée Würth France Erstein
- 2016 Galerie Frey, Salzburg Austria
- 2014 Galerie Frey, Salzburg, Austria
Punto sull`Arte, Varese, Italy
Galerie Frey, Vienna, Austria
- 2013 Galerie Jarmuschek+Partner, Berlin, Germany
Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2012 Kunsthalle Würth, Schwäbisch Hall, Germany
Museum Dr. Guislain, Gent, Belgium
Neue Galerie Gladbeck, Germany
Galerie Jarmuschek und Partner, Berlin, Germany
Galerie Frey, Salzburg, Austria
- 2011 Galerie Lausberg, Toronto
Berlin Art Projects-Showroom, Germany
- 2009 Stadtische Galerie Karlsruhe, Germany
- 2008 Palazzo Ducale, Genua, Italy
- 2007 58 Premio Michetti, Palazzo San Domenico, Museo
Michetti, Italy
- 2005 Galerie Voss, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2004 Galerie Judith Walker, Weizelsdorf/Rosental, Austria
- 2003 Galerie Associative Europeene de la Photographie
et de la video, Strassbourg, France
Mario Sequeira Gallery, Braga, Portugal
Spirale Arte, Milano, Italy
Galleria Roberta Lietti, Como, Italy
- 2002 Galerie fur zeitgenossische Kunst, Krefeld, Germany
- 2001 Galerie Damasquine & Aeroplastics, Brussels, Belgium
Galerie Christa Burger, Munich, Germany
Galerie Jahn, Landshut, Germany
- 2000 Galerie Associative Europeene de la Photographie
et de la Video, Strassbourg, France

CREDITS

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For all works in exhibition, please visit odonwagnergallery.com

Front Cover: UNTITLED 36 (detail) oil on canvas, 47 x 59 in. / 120 x 150 cm

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