

Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle

Ma Ke

Apr 13 – Jun 2, 2018

Opening: Thursday, Apr 12, 2018, 7 – 9 p.m.

The artist is present.



Ma Ke, Sky, 2017, 60 x 50 cm, oil on canvas.

This presentation marks the first time the works of Chinese artist Ma Ke are shown in a solo exhibition at Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle. Ma Ke's paintings captivate viewers with the clarity of their expression and their subtle power. His motifs of people in ostensibly adventurous and challenging settings, at times with dangerous set pieces, appear to us like scenes from a theatrical play. Bodies and faces are often dramatized, seeming masklike and exaggerated in their unnatural distortions and expressiveness, which is, paradoxically, what makes them even more readable and striking. Occasionally, one believes to be witnessing a circus act in which the protagonists must perform acrobatic feats using all manner of tricks and gimmicks. Partly, the images' disquieting air is further heightened by the seemingly artificial light shining down on the goings-on. The portrayals deal with human balancing acts that visualize the purely physical level as well as psychological moments. The figures are busy striving, hoping, and trying to strike a balance with both themselves and their stage partners. The images raise the question of whether they depict creatures facing their challenges apprehensively, boldly, or somewhere in-between or individuals suffering from their isolation and yearning for collective support.

For his exhibition in Munich, Ma Ke reexamines his recurring motif of the rider, who symbolizes the free individual for him and in whom he recognizes the image of Dionysus. In some instances, one may interpret the rider as the antithesis of those figures in the paintings that are constrained in their mobility by often indefinable objects: Conversely, the rider is untethered, even capable of overcoming gravity. The rider figure is regularly featured in Tang poetry (618–907 CE), where he is portrayed in moments of return or departure. Romantic landscapes steeped in the light of dusk and reflective surfaces of various bodies of water, sketched in a poetically reduced language, serve as backdrops in these early poems. Against these backgrounds, the rider is described in situations in which he effectively ascends to the heavens and is absorbed by them. No longer having to fight or hope, he is on his own independent path to a brighter future.

Ma Ke (born in Zibo, China) studied painting at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts and at the Central Academy of Fine Arts. In 1998/1999, he was a visiting professor of painting in Eritrea, where he gathered culturally significant experiences that have also found their way into his art. In 2017, Ma Ke completed an artist residency with the Laforêt Summer Vacation Project in Italy. He lives and works in Beijing. (S. Kunz)

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