

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Walter Swennen

515 West 24th Street
September 18 – October 19, 2019
Opening September 18, 6 – 8pm

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to present an exhibition of new and recent paintings by Belgian artist Walter Swennen, his third show with the gallery in New York. In this presentation, the artist continues his career-long exploration of language, culture, and memory through his incisively layered paintings, displaying the profound impact that psychology, mass media, and his own life experiences have had on his practice.

Known for his playful, vibrant, and contemplative paintings that defy one signature style, Swennen employs his background as a philosopher and poet to create works that are defined by the absence of a single aesthetic perspective or theoretical framework. Steeped in the work of Sigmund Freud, Søren Kierkegaard, and Jacques Lacan, among many others, the artist begins his painting process using a psychoanalytical approach. Sourcing imagery from his own personal history and remembered visual culture, Swennen creates works whose abstract and figurative elements oscillate between the subjects depicted and the gestures and techniques used in their representation. Color also plays a pivotal role in the artist's paintings: Swennen's intuitive, complex juxtapositions of hues belie the apparent simplicity of the mundane artifacts he depicts. These images are constantly circling, offering glimpses of half-forgotten childhood cartoons, spatial jokes, and appropriated symbols in ways that ambiguate his painterly expressions of fantasy, reality, and psychoanalytical elements.

Another significant component of Swennen's artmaking practice is his critical engagement with language. Early in the artist's life, his family abruptly switched from speaking his native tongue, Flemish, to speaking French at home. After some years, he was unable to speak or understand Flemish, a profound experience of language's abstraction, its instability, and its susceptibility to the free play of meaninglessness. Letters and fragmented sentences in English, Flemish, French and other languages appear in many of his canvases, alternately providing, removing, and complicating the meaning of painting. Blurring the lines between clarity and illegibility, seriousness and humor, and fact and fiction, Swennen's paintings demonstrate his constant experimentation and continual interest in combining materials, colors, and techniques in new, unconventional and inventive ways.

Walter Swennen was born in 1946 in Brussels, where he presently lives and works. His work has been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions at international institutions including La Triennale di Milano, Milan (2018); Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2015); WIELS Contemporary Art Center, Brussels (2013); Culturgest Lisbon (2013); Kunstverein Freiburg (2012); MuKHA Antwerp, Belgium (1994); and Kunsthal Rotterdam (1994). Swennen has also been included in notable group exhibitions including: "Atopolis, Manège de Sury," Mons (2015); "The Importance of Being...", Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (2015); "Idiolect," Arentshuis, Bruges (2009); "La Belgique Visionnaire/Visionair België," curated by Harald Szeemann, Palais des Beaux-Arts/Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, Brussels (2005); "Voir en Peinture," FRAC Ile de France/Le Plateau, Paris (2003); "La Consolation," Centre d'Art National Contemporain, Le Magasin, Grenoble (1999); and "Trouble Spot. Painting," MuKHA Antwerp (1999).

Allora & Calzadilla
530 West 21st Street
September 13 – November 2

Maureen Gallace
130 East 64th Street
September 21 – October 19

Claudia Comte
12 Rue du Grand Cerf
September 5 – October 12

For further information, please contact Andrew Huff: ahuff@gladstonegallery.com
New York gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday, 10am–6pm
Brussels gallery hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10am–6pm and Saturday, 12pm–6pm