

GLADSTONE GALLERY

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Paloma Varga Weisz "CHOR"

September 10 through October 8, 2005

Gladstone Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of work by Paloma Varga Weisz, her first solo show in the United States. Trained as a woodcarver, Varga Weisz's work evokes the feeling of medieval tableaux, though her reinterpreted images from current press, literature, and famed works of art form a world of their own. The fanciful hybrids of animals, noblewomen, and plague-stricken men that people both her sculpture and works on paper are not merely charming; rather, they serve to activate a certain relish for the unknown that intrigues and captivates the viewer.

Extracting the saintly faces and expressive drapery from the religious tendencies that have dominated the craft, Varga Weisz uses the techniques to create an abstracted personal vocabulary that relies on allusion to myth and history to map its course. Presented as an open-ended archeology of personal fantasy, these seemingly living installations perpetuate a sense of wonder while denying narrative impulse, prompting curator Jean-Christophe Amman to note that they have "much more to do with her observation of her emotions than with her emotions themselves." Her self-observation, though, mines a universal subconscious, analyzing the hybrids of imagination with a detached thoughtfulness. Cultivating the sense of a shared mythology to explain the surrounding world, Varga Weisz's sense of the imaginative is at once completely new but seemingly familiar. Through studying symptoms of religion, history, and folklore, the characters that populate her sculpture and works on paper foreground the necessity of personal and communal imaginative discourses. As Guido de Werd noted in an essay accompanying her exhibition at Museum Kurhaus Kleve, "the resultant scenes often seem fragmented, enigmatic, like pictures belonging to an unknown fairytale."

For her latest work, "Chor," Varga Weisz investigates the tropes of ecclesiastical decoration using the vaguely Jungian archetypes of her own invention. Dismantling architectural aspects of a church choir and scattering them throughout a neutralized white cube, she has created an installation of sculpture and drawings that transform the gallery into a place of mystery and grace. From above a figure of knotted cloth and wood hangs: In a tangle of fabric sweeping almost to the floor, disjointed feet, hands, and face emerge from the folds, recalling both a victim of medieval execution, as well as an ethereal creature suspended between heaven and earth. Perhaps standing in judgment over this scene, the choir sits upon pew-like benches. These busts of multi-faced women and dog-headed men create a diverse community of imaginary figures, which together recall both the polyphony of Christian choirs and also the austere moralistic codes of the Greek theatrical chorus. Elsewhere four young girls sit in prayer, their faces finely carved out of raw blocks of wood that seem to permanently shroud them in wimple and habit. These young girls stand witness to the mystery as the viewer does—in humble awe of the possibly miraculous events that are unfolding, but never fully revealed.

Paloma Varga Weisz was born in 1966 and raised in Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, Germany. After studying at the Kunstacademie Düsseldorf, she has continued to live and work there. She had a solo exhibition at the Museum Kurhaus Kleve and has been included in numerous group exhibitions at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, and the Kunstverein Düsseldorf, as well as in the permanent collection of K21. She was recently included in the 2005 Venice Biennale as a part of Rosa Martinez's exhibition "Always a Little Further." In 2006 she will participate in the Berlin Biennial, curated by Maurizio Cattelan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnik. A fully illustrated catalogue will accompany the exhibition.

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