

**Konstantinos Ladianos**

*Pink Boudoir*

solo show

Duration: 23.01.18 - 10.03.18

In his solo show at CAN gallery Konstantinos Ladianos (b.1967) continues constructing a universe of images that testify to the equal acceptance of the everyday and the unlikely, the ordinary and the marvellous, mixing personal memories with religious imagery, mythical representations and lyrical narratives in order to create a personal space that aims to explore the limits of human existence. Installed over a pink room reminiscent of a boudoir, the artist presents paintings with his characteristic technique of egg tempera on wood, painted constructions with aluminium reliefs and a series of handmade embroideries adorned with ribbons in black, blue, pink and golden fabrics.

The term *Boudoir* in the title of the exhibition refers to a woman's private salon or sitting room usually situated between the dining room and the bedroom where ladies used to withdraw to after dinner. Marquis de Sade (1740-1814) in his literary works helped develop a scandalous reputation about this area dedicated to the privacy of female talks. Ladianos in his exhibition embraces the term and creates his own private space -a boudoir for both men and women- devoted to his most private and secret thoughts and quests.

Sade's book "Philosophy in the Boudoir" ("La Philosophie dans le Boudoir") though initially considered a work of pornography, was later recognised as a social-political drama. Set in such a bedroom, the two lead characters argue that the only moral system that reinforces the political revolution is libertinism and that if the French fail to adopt the libertine philosophy, the country is destined to return to a state of monarchy. The book fully reflects Sade's philosophy on religion and morality and suggests that it would be beneficial for society if citizens embraced atheism and rejected society's beliefs in regards to pleasure and pain.

In his own *Pink Boudoir* the artist reflects upon such thoughts regarding God, life, morality and freedom and creates a whole new universe of characters and symbols. The two large painted works presented in this exhibition both face inwards. On one hand a sublime landscape that spreads from the depths of the earth to the top of a high mountain, with a huge eye watching over it, and on the other hand a work of magic realism depicting a strikingly dressed woman who fries eggs while standing on a boat that floats in a flooded room.

Influenced by John Milton's (1608-1674) famous epic poem "Paradise Lost" which deals with issues such as the fall of man, good and evil, reason, free will, God's power and man's self-sufficiency, Ladianos creates a work that resembles a map of life. But whereas according to Milton the eye of God (meaning divine energy) penetrates not only man but also nature, the universe, and so on, for Ladianos, the gold-ray eye does not stand for the eye of God but the eye of man, an esoteric gaze onto ourselves that permeates our existence throughout our lives and symbolises man's internal crisis that is relentless, tough and intransitive, that sometimes holds him captive and some other times helps him gain freedom through knowledge and truth.

Moreover, in Ladianos' work often the important seems insignificant and the insignificant important, the charged uncharged and weiss-versa. Events that seem real may have a fantastic side, as some cannot be explained or are quite unlikely to happen. Magic or imaginary elements -such as the presence of water and a boat inside a room- are perceived by the characters as part of reality, while time may roll in an unorthodox way, present mixed with the past (returns) and the future (developments), or even appear contradictory, as in the painting depicting the mountain where it seems to be both night and day. At the same time, contemporary portraits of people from the artist's close circle seem like if they came from an entirely different era while often the humanity of his characters is entangled with the magical or the grandiose, deepening their motives and placing them on a mythical or religious-historical context. This creates an interesting contradiction, a reconciliation of the supernatural element with an inner truthfulness, a blend between the transcendent and the real.

Along the painted works Ladianos has also created a large set of embroideries, a technique that has been traditionally regarded as female. Indeed, in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries in Europe and America a girl was expected to grow up, marry, have children and take care of the home. Within this limited sphere, instead of pursuing academic studies, girls were sent to "dame schools" that taught an assortment of skills considered "female accomplishments" such as music, watercolour painting, manners and sewing. Young girls usually begun by embroidering letters and numbers and then went on to learn to create more complex needlework that served an important function: it revealed the values of the girl and her family to potential suitors. The acceptance of death and the remembrance of the dead through embroidered portraits were a frequent theme, as were also scenes from romantic poems, the old testament even representations of the home itself. The completed work was usually framed and hung in the parlour, proclaiming obedience to one's parents and to God, and emphasising the "female virtues" such as patience and skill in sewing of the maker.

Against this *comme il faut* atmosphere of gender specific refinement, the artist uses the traditionally "female art" of embroidery to create his own universe, depicting previously forbidden or taboo subjects such as erotic poses and details of male nudes. The way he embroiders his subjects -with great sensitivity and care- turns the erotic scenes into "filtered", almost "domestic". Bodies appear calm, discharged from the history of nude. Previously shocking images become playful, innocent, almost like candies or bon bon. Finally, Ladianos uses the so-called "Millennial Pink" in his choice of fabrics. This desaturated shade of pink has something different, both sincere and nostalgic at the same time. The colour that started showing up and be discussed everywhere in recent years is said to have first appeared in Wes Anderson's 2014 film *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. It then starred in the shopping bags of the Swedish fashion house Acne studios before becoming the international mascot of pink that came to remind us that colour -as many things in life- is not defined by gender.

Bio. Konstantinos Ladianos was born in Athens, Greece in 1967. He studied painting at the School of Fine Arts of the Aristotelion University of Thessaloniki under Dimitris Condos. He mainly works with painting and embroidery. The human figure is always central to his oeuvre through which he expresses his ontological concern over issues of faith, culture and aesthetics. He had a solo exhibition at CAN Gallery in 2015 and he has exhibited in a variety of shows such as "Spiritual Materialism" at Ileana Tounta Centre for Contemporary Art, "Something That is Beautiful" at ELIKA gallery, "Feed me" at GazonRouge Loraini Alimantiri gallery, "Lustlands" at Family Business, New York, "Hell AS Pavilion" at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, "(O)IKEA Hydra School Projects" in Hydra, "Paint-id" at the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki, "What remains is future" in Patras, European Cultural Capital and others. He lives and works between Athens and Hydra.

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