

STU MEAD

FORTNIGHT INSTITUTE

The Witching Hour

60 East 4th St. NYC

Curated by Ariella Wolens

March 29 - April 26, 2019

Opening Thursday, March 28, 6-8pm

Fortnight Institute is pleased to present *The Witching Hour*, an exhibition of paintings by the artist Stu Mead. Born in the United States, Mead is currently based in Berlin, Germany, where he has lived since 2000. This show marks the first solo presentation of Mead's work in New York. Long celebrated as a radical figure within the confines of the underground art world, Stu Mead's art is located more specifically within the perilous terrain of erotic painting. A constant composer of masturbatory imaginings, Mead's work is an unfettered vision of male desire, in which women are both venerated and unabashedly sexualized. It is a depiction of sex unmarked by the laws of decorum, a portrait of reality that accepts and embraces humanity's proclivity for perversion. Like Robert Mapplethorpe, Mead has never flinched at the libidinal power of taboos.

While sex and painting have long gone hand in hand – the scopophilic tradition of art having been well cemented from Classical Antiquity onwards – anti-Freudian forms of feminism, which have rejected the realities of the differences between the sexes, mean that art such as Mead's must be tucked away, shoved under the bed of an art world which feigns liberalism but shirks any true transgression of boundaries. We may have become de-sensitized to the porn paintings of John Currin and gang bang scenes by Paul McCarthy, but there is something about the honesty in the perverted scenes concocted by Mead, that has relegated his work to the fringes.

Having begun his formal training as a painter in his late twenties, Mead's signature style has developed over the last thirty years to be defined by a sad-sack vision of masculinity, the kind found in the art of Mike Kelley and R. Crumb; men are mere schmucks, defenseless in the face of their desires. As noted by Barry Schwabsky, it is the subject matter, as opposed to the style of Mead's work, that defines his painting. It is a form that is steeped in narrative, which confronts us with snippets from the artist's dreams and nightmares (the designation of which is unclear.) In one of Mead's flagstone paintings, a girl's hands are being cut off by a maleficent nun, another depicts a sneering voyeur peeking out behind a curtain to catch a glimpse of a coquettish redhead. Each painting offers a juicy detail plucked straight out of the artist's unconscious.

Mead's facture is reminiscent of another subterranean narrative, that of the underground comix culture, the incubator for outcasts such as Crumb, Mike Diana and Spain Rodriguez. This connection to the illustrative tradition - with its pronounced outlines, stark color contrasts and uncensored content - provides a lineage for Mead's work in which violence, sex and self-loathing are at the forefront. That which "fine art" only dips its toes in, is where these artists dive head first.

This exhibition takes its name, *The Witching Hour*, from the folkloric term which originated in Protestant spheres of Medieval Europe. The phrase connotes both the supernatural power of femininity (one that is ultimately connected to sexual power) and the mythological world that Mead's paintings inhabit. Whether invoking the rituals of religion or rendering a scene in the dead of night - when wickedness is most potent – Mead's art reveals a world which is truer to life, with its human urges and sexual intensity, than any form of artist realism.

Stu Mead (b.1955, Waterloo, Iowa) is a Berlin based artist whose practice encompasses painting, drawing, printmaking and zine production. Mead's work has been internationally exhibited, with recent presentations at Taco-che, Tokyo (2018), Arts Factory, Paris (2017) and Galerie Toxic, Luxembourg (2016.) On the occasion of *The Witching Hour*, a monographic publication has been produced in collaboration with Visitor Design. This book includes an interview between Mead and the American painter and art critic, Walter Robinson, and takes the form of a facsimile of Mead's sketchbooks, featuring plannings for a number of paintings included in this exhibition. This exhibition is organized in collaboration with curator Ariella Wolens.