

Rebekka Steiger

ma quỷ vô đồng tử - ghosts without pupils

Galerie Urs Meile Zurich
September 1 - October 14, 2023
Opening: Friday, September 1, 11 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Reception: Friday, September 1, 6 - 8 p.m., the artist
will be present

Galerie Urs Meile Lucerne
September 7 - October 28, 2023
Opening: Thursday, September 7, 5.30 - 7.30 p.m.

Galerie Urs Meile is looking forward to present *ma quỷ vô đồng tử - ghosts without pupils*, a solo show in two parts by Rebekka Steiger in Zurich and Lucerne. The Vietnamese title, as well as the works on display in both venues, bear evidence to the artist's latest residence in Vietnam. In April 2023 Rebekka Steiger returned from Ho Chi Minh City, where she had lived and worked for seven months. Renting a tiny tube-house in a local neighbourhood and making an effort to learn and speak Vietnamese, the artist strived to submerge herself into an unknown surrounding and culture. The discovery of painting materials very different to their Swiss equivalents as well as the intensity of daily life, including the presence of Vietnamese animism, prompted Steiger's visual language and working method to evolve yet again.

Ghosts are ever-present in Vietnam. Out of respect and curiosity for the local traditions of venerating the dead, the artist sought the assistance of her Vietnamese teacher to undertake a house-inauguration ceremony. The main goal of the ritual is to keep "ma quỷ" - homeless ghosts turned demonic - from haunting the neighborhood. The topic manifests itself in Steiger's work as well: "Be it the dispersing figures in *SWIRL (smoke with induced rotation and lofting)*, 2023, recurring motives such as the enigmatic skirted figure standing next to a pool of light or lava (e.g. *valenska*, 2023) as well as the "Kitsune" (Japanese) or "hò ly" (Vietnamese): legendary ghost-women that can turn into powerful foxes - all of a sudden I had ghosts and demons facing me everywhere in my paintings, often without even having consciously painted them there."

Discussions with her teacher ensued in regards to the danger, that might be caused by the painted bodyless. Regarding the depiction of figures there exists a widespread belief in Asia: As long as it bears no pupils, the image of a "ma quỷ" remains just that: an image. Since the artist was not able to exclude the presence of pupils in the respective works entirely, the title of the exhibition is less a description of content than a precautionary measure: By denying the painted ghosts their realness, any potential harm caused by them is hopefully prevented.

Steiger's artistic practice is characterized by her delighting in new experiences, combined with the curiosity to expand her technical repertoire. The close examination of materials and their inherent possibilities inform her virtuoso abstract conjectures and figurative vocabulary.

In the artist's prior series, figures were largely absent. Working solely with ink and water the fluidity of the paint itself made detailed figurative content neigh on impossible. With her work from Vietnam the artist picks up on these flowing, color merging ink-landscapes, but re-introduces her figures and bestiary as focal points into the paintings. The thicker acrylic ink the artist discovered in Ho Chi Minh City could both be used very fluid when diluted and viscous when not. This property allowed for creating more defined shapes even on very wet canvas.

Language has played a major role in Steiger's oeuvre, the linguistic ambiguities of Chinese and Vietnamese becoming a source for titles to her paintings. By naming her paintings and so re-examining them in retrospect the artist achieves a multi-layered understanding of her own work.

The artist Rebekka Steiger (*1993, Zurich) lives in Zurich. She understands painting as a “state of mind”. In her self-confident fusion of form and color, she develops a fascinating, intense visual language that deals with the familiar and unfamiliar and sets no limit to the viewer’s imagination. Steiger graduated with a Bachelor in Fine Arts from the Hochschule Luzern (HSLU) in 2016. Since then, her works have been presented as solo exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Luzern, Galerie Urs Meile in Lucerne and Beijing, Kunst(Zeug)Haus in Rapperswil-Jona, Tank Museum in Shanghai, and as part of a group exhibitions at Meicheng Space in Shenzhen, Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich, Galerie Bromer in Zurich, and Galerie Urs Meile in Lucerne, Ardez, and Beijing, among others. She spent 2018-2019 in residencies in Beijing, China and from 2022-2023 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.
Rebekka Steiger works in Lucerne.