

Humans, Robots, and the Animal within.

Matthias Dornfeld's naïve painting on view at Soy Capitán.

At the sight of the playful animal parade of *Quadrupede* you might hallucinate the clicking of hooves, stiletto heels, or the treading of soft bear paws. Reminiscent of children's drawings – a creative register every one of us can relate to first-hand – Dornfeld's art doesn't need explanation in order to unfold its curious vitality.

Each of the large-scale paintings in *Quadrupede* showcases one singular animal in side view, against an indefinite, empty background. *Lionesse* (2017), as the title and the creature's claws suggest, presents a female lion. Its bulky trunk, however, glows in a bright pink – and on its shoulders: A tubby, blue smiley-face, crowned by a splendid aureola. The strange chimera stretches her limbs and tail across the full spread of the canvas, placidly returning our gaze... In Dornfeld's paintings, simplicity unfolds psychological complexity, and the naïve merges with the magical.

To some degree, the naïve aesthetic of Dornfeld's pictorial world evokes the art of autodidact Henri Rousseau (who inspired the Surrealists and many other French avant-gardists), and the deskilled, expressive brush strokes of 1980s German neo-expressionism. However, Dornfeld's approach to painting involves a deliberate 'unlearning' of such art historical discourses and the academic training derived from them.

The medium of painting, for Matthias Dornfeld, provides access to a long-lost state of mind: One, aware of a deeply rooted kinship between everything that creeps and crawls in this world. "Ein Pferd", the artist says teasingly, "ist ja auch nur ein Mensch" ("A horse, after all, is also just human"). We may deem four-legged gait to be a distinguishing feature of the animal – and tend to forget that it also marks a transitional state in human evolution, and our way of discovering the world in infancy.

Human hubris is known to present a very concrete threat to the modern world we live in. And there's already a new species of quadrupeds on the rise: A vanguard of four-legged military robots, BigDogs® and WildCats® (developed by science labs such as BostonDynamics), can already be watched practicing their jumps on YouTube. Today – maybe more than ever – re-accessing an understanding of ourselves, which places us within the continuity of the world's creatures, might be a vital exercise.

– Berlin, September 2017, Katharina Weinstock

Matthias Dornfeld: Quadrupede

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Soy Capitán, Berlin