

**GALLERIA POGGIALI  
MILAN**

presents

**Olaf Breuning  
*We are all in the same boat***

*The weight of the color*

**curated by Lorenzo Bruni**

**30.01.2020 - 28.03.2020**

**Opening Thursday 30.01.2020 from 6.30 to 9 p.m.**

Galleria Poggiali Milano  
Foro Buonaparte 52 - 20121 Milano

On Thursday 30 January 2020, from 6.30 p.m., the **Galleria Poggiali** presents in its **Milan** premises the first solo show in Italy of the work of Olaf Breuning (Schaffhausen, 1970), born in Switzerland but a New Yorker by adoption. The title of the show, curated by Lorenzo Bruni, is *We are All In the Same Boat*.

Breuning has made his name through solo shows in a range of illustrious venues including the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the Chisenhale Gallery in London, the Kunsthall in Stavanger, the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, and through attendance at various biennials such as the Whitney Biennial in New York and the Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement in Geneva.

For his show in the Milan premises of the Galleria Poggiali, in Foro Buonaparte 52, **Olaf Breuning** has conceived an immersive environment provoking reflection on how the current stimuli of everyday life are methodically recorded, metabolised and put forward anew by digital users. A key to this approach is embodied in the large sculpture in the centre of the room, consisting of a metal ladder mounted on which is the outline of a stylised face with a heart in the centre made out of shiny steel. The two-dimensional structure becomes volumetric and elusive as a result of the images that it inexorably reflects. The artist adopts this multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary dimension throughout the show, even including the installation featuring black Indian ink showing possible but imaginary scenes evoking an original, intimate and choral narration.

As Lorenzo Bruni writes: *Breuning's research has always been attentive to social change and images used as the instruments of a new ritual. It is interesting to note how, over the last ten years, the artist's paradoxical irony has progressively moved towards an ontological, archetypal and universal dimension. The works featured in the Milan show – a large site-specific photographic installation and his latest video – offer crucial clues to where he is currently going. The first work is an image of strong visual impact, partly because it completely fills one of the walls of the gallery and also in terms of the subject: a motley group of people standing inside a boat in the middle of a wood, staring straight at the observer and bodying out the proverb 'We Are All In the Same Boat'. The second work is a video called Sunny showing a close-up shot of the face of a child watching a unique event which we are not allowed to see. In both cases, these are monuments to wonder, to going beyond cultural superstructures, an invitation not to be squashed by so-called common sense but to reflect, not only on the role of art, but also on that of the conscious observer in a global world just a click away.*

The works present in the *We Are All In the Same Boat* show at the Galleria Poggiali are from different years and, above all, in different media, including both site-specific and independent images. The artist sets them in a novel, intense dialogue so as to bring forth questions that are at once obvious and disturbing: who are the messages that we produce daily on the web for, and why do we produce them? Olaf Breuning responds by placing in the forefront the experiential dimension that concerns the event in all its specific physical and psychological aspects. For this reason, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of this show as time-specific rather than site-specific, since it is engaged with emphasising the time of the process of the work and of its fruition. This is the same approach that the artist has used over the last ten years to explore the concept of colour in the digital society and in relation to the history of art. In other words, with the aim of giving a new

importance to the moment of the manifestation and transformation of colour, rather than its being a mere attribute of the form.

The photograph *Happy Painters* has been selected to represent the show since, as Lorenzo Bruni explains: *it is in a way the apex of Breuning's approach and his interest in apparently abstract images in which the instant of the creation or the staging of the colour emerges. Happy Painters consists of a series of dripping brushes each bearing a single colour, to which dolls eyes and feet have been applied to anthropomorphise them. In this way the means by which the pictorial work is produced becomes the subject, even though the disconcerting aspect derives from the fact that the group of brushes, cocky and independent, appear to be observing and judging what they have before them, transcending their status as inanimate objects.*

The show will be accompanied by a catalogue with a critical text by Lorenzo Bruni.

**Olaf Breuning** (Switzerland, 1970; lives and works in New York) since the mid-90s has been producing works that usher the observers into surreal worlds through performance, film, photography, sculpture and drawing, and more recently through works connected with painting. He frequently seeks inspiration in the pop culture, adding touches of humour to his work, offering original observations on the rules of global society. *Mr. Breuning specializes in relentless satire that sends up all manner of visual and social conventions: television, sports, bad movies and worse rock bands, as well as fairy tales, creation myths, tribal rites (past and present and mostly male) and, naturally, contemporary art. His New York debut offers an installation, a video and eight large color photographs, and it progresses from abysmal to promising.* This is how the critic Roberta Smith of the *New York Times* greeted Breuning's first show in November 2001, shortly after the catastrophe of 11 September, in which the artist proposed the exorcising of fear and of the spectacularising culture. These works were the harbingers of aspects that are now widespread, such as finding oneself in complete solitude in the midst of a crowd, or like the incomprehensible desire to barter one's privacy for a feeling of security. Instead, the introduction to volume 71 of *Parkett* in 2004 observed: *Fanciful figures they are, those youthful creatures who stare at us out of Olaf Breuning's photographs and videos. And yet their sectarian looks, their air of disheveled arcane knowledge, trash archaic civilization and marketing slavery, communicate a disturbing sense of gruff exclusion.* These comments are also pertinent to describing the famous video *Home*, presented in 2008 at the Whitney Biennial in New York. Subsequently, attentive to social change, Breuning began to concentrate on new dynamics, such as that of colours about to explode in a crazy work in progress, the idea being to raise the observer's degree of awareness apropos his/her daily life, digital and not. Here too, irony is the weapon that Breuning employs to observe reality as if for the first time, but also the act of creation of a work and the sense of creativity. This is the perspective of the installation *Clouds* in Central Park (2014), introducing colour that is at once false and iconic: clouds of bright blue aluminium propose a sculpture without volume, materialising a comic-strip imaginary. The same holds for the gigantic mural created at the Zentrum Paul Klee (2013), produced using a geometric grid to screen and define the splashes of colour from cups of paint perched on the grid that visitors were invited to throw balls at. Both these cases are reactions to the gesture of the painter conceived as a solipsistic element separated from the flow of life. The artist went on to open up a radical reflection on the subject of the museum, the collection and the role of the work of art in a digital era characterised by intangible archives. Olaf Breuning's recent shows include *The Life* at Metro Pictures, New York (2015); *The HOME Trilogy* at Metro Pictures, New York (2013); *Human Nature* at the Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London (2012); *The Art Freaks* at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2011). The artist's works are also in prestigious collections all over the world, including the Kunsthau in Zurich, the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia; the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Copenhagen; the Fondazione Ellipse in Portugal; the Collezione La Gaia in Italy and many others.

#### **INFORMATION**

Galleria Poggiali Milano  
Foro Buonaparte 52 | 20121 Milano  
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Tuesday - Saturday: 10:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. / 3:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.

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