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Ana Torfs
Interview

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Bjarne Melgaard - Rod Bianco. Super Normal

19.06.10 - 05.09.10

De Appel

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Bjarne Melgaard
Rod Bianco. Super Normal

Presstext:

'Fiction interests me much more than real life. I always prefer when somebody's telling me an interesting lie rather than a boring truth.'
Bjarne Melgaard

This summer, de Appel presents a Solo Project by the Norwegian artist Bjarne Melgaard (1967), a show with its artistic starting point located in the mental world of Rod Bianco. Melgaard is one of the most chameleonic figures in contemporary art. His work evolves and mutates at breakneck speed owing to his continual introduction of new themes, ideas and semi-imaginary characters such as Bernard St. Summiere, Mr. Black Pearl, Rummelsnuff, Joey Stefano, Frost and Les Super. Bianco is the latest protagonist; he is neither an alter ego nor an avatar of the artist, but a fictional personality who may simultaneously be regarded as a 'production unit'. The entirety of work and activities that develops under his auspices is legible as a multilayered visual novel. Melgaard reveals himself in this respect as a gifted storyteller who constructs a narrative microcosm by means of visual and textual indications.

Melgaard's fascination with sometimes provocative subcultures and practices has previously induced him to explore the worlds of Black Metal, violent homosexuality and sadomasochism. Now too he remains partial to the 'unusual'; no reputation is spared and no taboo eschewed. Besides a series of sculptures, the exhibition includes a new series of photorealistic paintings which are overpainted with Melgaard's hallmark expressionistic iconography and vigorous linear gestures.

The exhibition is the final part of a trilogy in which he has explored such controversial subject matter as the North American Man/Boy Love Association or NAMBLA (Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, 2010) and heterosexual erotic experiments conducted in 1970s New York (Greene Naftali Gallery, NY, 2010). At de Appel, he amalgamates sculptural tributes to that strange Australian mammal the platypus, references to West-African traditional sculpture, popular and underground music phenomena, Western European art history and fictitious autobiographical anecdotes to evoke and interrogate the (stereotypical) representation of black men in and outside of mainstream media.

Bianco's artistic universe is populated and inspired by the late manager of the Sex Pistols, Malcolm McLaren, by the stylized dance genres of Vogue and Ballroom as pioneered by new york black gay icon Willi Ninja, by the painting of the nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelites, by the ideas and visual campaigns of the rapper Kurtis Blow, by images of child soldiers from Sierra Leone and by the sculptures of bygone matriarchal societies in West Africa (Benin). His combination of these ostensibly disparate sources is motivated by his overarching interest in the roles of gender and stereotyping in the formation of identity, in particular sexual identity, and by his interest in a reversal and subversion of the classic role models.