



REVIEW - 22 NOV 2016

# Carpet for a Lord

Supportico Lopez, Berlin, Germany

BY MITCH SPEED



'Carpet for a Lord', 2016, installation view, Supportico Lopez, Berlin. Photograph: Nick Ash © Nele Heinevetter

In recent years, the human figure has crept back into the exhibition space, often in prop form, within quasi-theatrical *mises-en-scène*. The group show at Supportico Lopez, 'Carpet for a Lord', stages this kind of incursion with delectable charm. The exhibition's most vibrant players are three gawking faces by Judith Hopf (all *Untitled*, 2013–14) made with geometric ceramic tiles in humming tertiary colours, affixed to plywood. Two faces emerge from black puddles on the floor like cartoon apparitions, while another hangs from rickety scaffolding, lending the exhibition a séance-like atmosphere.

The show's uncanny mood is amplified by the way certain works slink into the nether-regions of the gallery. Ola Vasiljeva, for example, has used white marker to scrawl pellucid drawings, of men in tailcoats and breeches, onto the gallery's windows. In a dim recess, Daniele Milvio's painting, *Quel che resta di un esercito* (What Remains of an Army, 2015), shows two figures in flowing 1970s clothing, leaning on a tombstone-like black rectangle engraved with a matrix of letters. One figure has a baroque insect head, the other a macabre deer skull. To complete this occult scene, the painting is flanked by two brass fists holding candles.



'Carpet for a Lord', 2016, installation view, Supportico Lopez, Berlin. Photograph: Nick Ash

While 'Carpet for a Lord' feels like an impossibly diverse imaginary environment – a Victorian terrarium or Michel Foucault's heterotopia, say – certain works stray from the creaturely theme, enriching the show's narrative backdrop. Ettore Spalletti's blue monochrome *Ma, sì, azzurro* (But, Yes, Blue, 2010), for example, hangs beside Haim Steinbach's wall-mounted shelf holding two brass seal presses paired with an old 'meerschaum' pipe (*Untitled [punches, pipe]*, 2010). Steinbach's readymade pairing lends the show an eccentric, Wes-Anderson-esque air of whimsy.

This antiquarian mannerism carries over into Charlie Billingham's large-scale paintings, in which sword-wielding, knicker-sporting, tri-corn-hat-wearing cartoon characters blunder and pose. In *Kiss-Chase* (2016), three colonial gentleman fall over themselves in a fluorescent landscape, as if fleeing some mysterious horde. This subject matter might signify an aggravating compound of nostalgia and irony, were it not for Billingham's bright, acidic enthusiasm. A bit of stage setting that helps, too: Billingham's paintings are hung on a blue-painted swathe of wall, situating them in a fantastical cartoon sky.



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Some works are still growing on me; others may never take hold. Than Hussein Clark's dissected chairs, *Cancellation Microphone and Cancellation: Amplifier* (both 2015), for instance – which have been recombined and bound with rope into jaunty, mildly deranged shapes. These pieces seem suspended in an ambivalent realm, between classical sculpture and a cheeky deconstruction of luxury. But set next to so many humanoid creatures, executed in lively shapes and colours, they also suggest the sado-masochistic nature of art-making. In this way, 'Carpet for a Lord' animates pieces that I'd normally drift past, like Jill Mulleady's *No* (2015), a seemingly old-fashioned still life, painted in dim hues, in which smoke ominously descends upon a table set for two.

So well does this show breathe life into the personalities of its constituents that you could believe the works conjured their environment for themselves, like a troupe of prickly drop-outs. Vasiljeva's sculpture *Club of Ignorant Scholars* (2015) might well be the group's ringleader: a figure made from wooden dowels, dressed in paper pin-striped with red crayon. This personage kicks its feet up on a table and appears to be gazing at a chart on the wall. But it doesn't have a head to gaze with. Made from red blown glass striated with rivulets of black, its shoes are the centre of attention. Resembling ruby squashes, they have a self-effacing magnetism, much like the show itself.

Main image: 'Carpet for a Lord', 2016, installation view, Supportico Lopez, Berlin. Photograph: Nick Ash

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