

PRESS RELEASE

April 2023

Claas Reiss presents 'eavesdropping' by Dan Linden

27 Apr to 3 Jun 2023

Private view on Thursday 27 Apr 2023 from 5pm to 8pm

Claas Reiss presents 'eavesdropping' with new works by London based artist Dan Linden in his second solo exhibition with the gallery and an exhibition text by Tom Marks, formerly editor of Apollo Magazine.

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"This trick of going to the café Eiles had always worked. I would go in, get myself a pile of newspapers, and recover my composure. Nor did it have to be the café Eiles: the Museum or the Bräunerhof also produced the desired effect. Just as some people run to the park or the woods in search of calm and distraction, I have always run to the coffeehouse." Woodcutters (1984), Thomas Bernhard

Vienna projects an image of self-assurance. There is the immaculate calm of the Volksgarten, the people's park, with the neoclassical Theseus Temple at its centre, or the monumental order of the Ringstrasse boulevard, lined with civic buildings and museums that insist on power and endurance. And of course there are the famous coffeehouses – the communal living rooms of the city, so it is often said, with their fabled promise of belonging.

For the painter Dan Linden, that image of Vienna is in part a personal touchstone. He spent a formative year in the city, studying at the Universität für Angewandte Kunst – where he also met his future wife – while on an exchange programme during his BA at Newcastle University. For happy months he steeped himself in the city's architecture and public collections, in the Secession Building and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, as well as in the novels of those complex, astute elegists of the Austro-Hungarian Weltanschauung, Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig. 'It was the first time I found subject matter that I could somehow claim,' he says.

For Linden, however, from his first visit onwards Vienna has also been a site of unease. Ever attentive to his own Jewish heritage, and beyond that to the inalienable contribution of Jewish artists and intellectuals to central European culture, he found in the Austrian capital a city that veiled its crimes under the Nazi regime in a lofty silence which masqueraded as urban politesse. At least 170,000 Jews had lived in Vienna before the declaration of Anschluss in 1938; by late 1942 only around 7,000 Jews remained in the whole of Austria. An estimated 65,000 Austrian Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, and tens of thousands more were forced to flee.

The artist felt the strangeness and apparent wilfulness of the city's amnesia: of its extant monuments to politicians complicit in persecution, of a Ringstrasse that seemed to have forgotten it was once home to many prominent Jewish families. Even Rachel Whiteread's Judenplatz Holocaust Memorial, that vast concrete library of unknowable books, seemed to correspond too neatly with the muted palette of the Viennese townscape. In his mind Linden began to offset the propriety of the contemporary city against vertiginous visions of the place: that Vienna of precipices, subterranean descents and long shadows, for example, conjured by Carol Reed so memorably in *The Third Man* (1949).

The sense of a city at once familiar and estranging, of a place that continues to banish its ghosts, is strongly registered in Linden's 'eavesdropping' works. This series of five large paintings compresses imagery gathered by the artist on a trip to Vienna in May 2022 as well as material drawn from a wide range of cinematic, literary and art-historical sources. They offer moments of orientation, if you know where to look: the steep gable of St Stephen's Cathedral in S-Bahn; a tile bearing a cockerel-design from the long-vanished Cabaret Fledermaus reflected in a café mirror in Stammgast. And yet with their mirrors and reflective surfaces, their disorienting crops (as in the foreground of S-Bahn), their foregrounded objects (or perhaps obstacles) and their withholding of visual information, these paintings rebuff the representation of recognisable space.

That these are composite images defines both their making and intent. Although iPhone photographs, drawings and watercolours contribute to Linden's process, his paintings never follow premeditated designs, only finding

form as he applies paint to the linen support. His preferred medium is distemper, which he mixes from pigment and is water re-soluble, allowing him to wash back the surface to reveal the linen or layers of paint laid down previously. He describes his technique as a 'call and response' method, in which any decision or digression with paint will determine his next move – an exploratory tactic that allows for the introduction of allusions as the pictorial space gradually emerges.

The room depicted in *The Clowns*, for instance, is a child's bedroom, yet one that has come to encompass other stages: the clown motif reflected behind the bed is drawn from a café interior (in Paris), which itself brought images by George Grosz and his contemporaries to Linden's mind, while the capsized picture of soldiers in uniform is a transposed still from *J'Accuse* (2019), a film about the Dreyfus affair. The planetary mobile that hangs above the bed is an oblique reference to the German writer W.G. Sebald, who in books such as *The Rings of Saturn* (1995) beat his own circuitous pathways through the dark thickets of the recent European past (with the painter Nick Goss, who he met when Goss taught a session on the MFA course at the Slade, Linden has discussed how painting might attain a correlative to Sebald's narrative techniques). The painting establishes a shaky truce between innocence and experience.

At a technical level, the collaged nature of Linden's images consistently repudiates the settled depth or perspective that might grant the viewer their bearings in these depicted spaces. Areas of the paintings that have been screenprinted, rubbed rough or pressed with ridged cardboard draw the eye back to the surface – a movement that corresponds to the artist's concurrent attitudes of being immersed in and alienated from his subject. The cakes in *Stammgast*, for instance, are printed with an enlarged image of a marbled floor pattern in a Viennese café, turning actual architecture topsy-turvy at the level of the picture plane. In the give and take between constructed image and insistent surface lies more of that tension which Linden perceives between past and present – between a historical consciousness and the immediate texture of urban life.

All the same, there is a hard-won coherence to each of these paintings, which have the character of scenes once glimpsed then recalled as particular moods or atmospheres. It is there, not least, in the internal consistency of their light. In *S-Bahn*, for instance, there is that queasy admixture of warmth and wan-ness, giving the impression, as a crowd flows past a seemingly stalled tram carriage that, Linden says, 'something might just have happened or be about to happen'.

The sense of being at a threshold to knowledge – a knowledge which we may or may not rightfully access – is perhaps most palpable in *Eavesdropping*, the painting that lends the series its title. The scene is a bar or fast-food joint, albeit one infused with the spirit of the Wiener Werstätte through its geometric patterns, incidental or otherwise. A figure in a baseball cap conceals his mouth with his hand. Is he simply taking up a pose, a stance of habit, of composure? Or is he whispering confidences – secrets or difficult truths that he would not want us to overhear?

(Tom Marks, April 2023)

Dan Linden (born 1989 in UK) graduated with First Class (BA Hons) Fine Art from Newcastle University in 2013 and MFA Fine Art from Slade School of Fine Art, London in 2021. He also studied at Universität für Angewandte Kunst in Vienna, Austria, as an Erasmus exchange student and at Hunter College in New York City, USA under Carrie Moyer. Dan was included in Saatchi's New Sensations group show in 2013 and London Grads Now in 2020. 'eavesdropping' at Claas Reiss is Dan's second solo show with the gallery. Dan lives and works in London, UK.

For further information please visit www.claasreiss.com, email info@claasreiss.com or call +44 7769 566 922. Normal gallery opening hours during exhibitions are Wed to Fri 11am - 6pm, Sat 12:00pm - 6:00pm and by appointment.