

## CHRISTIAN REX VAN MINNEN *Skin Bone Quinacridone Adrenochrome*

We present the first solo exhibition in Spain by Christian Rex van Minnen (b. Providence, Rhode Island, 1980): *Skin Bone Quinacridone Adrenochrome* brings together a wide selection of recent works—some fifteen oil paintings and nine monotypes—mainly produced this year. The American artist describes this series of works as an attempt to create a conceptual and emotional link between the various layers of oil paint, imbuing them with meaning, as his creative process combines a meticulous glazing technique with an organic, surreal development of pictorial forms, in an approach almost reminiscent of automatism.

Van Minnen is interested in how painting has bones, skin, and spirit. The skeleton referred to in the title of the exhibition would be the layer of grisaille that serves as the basis for the composition, the geometric structure hidden behind the layers of paint, which is often inspired by old paintings and sometimes by marble or terracotta sculptures. This secret geometry of the structure supporting us brings calm and stillness; the grisaille that reflects the light through the skin acts like a substructure of slower and calmer narrative.

The glazes, made with modern pigments of hypersaturated colors, act as skin, representing a sensation in opposition to that of the compositional structure. Layers of flattened narratives and histories are overlaid and covered with tattoos and tags, images drawn from contemporary visual culture, modern myths, and pop archetypes. Quinacridone is an example of a synthetic, artificial, chemical, acidic, fluorescent, digital, and ultra-modern pigment, with an uncouth and intense potency, that contrasts with the equilibrium underlying it.

Skeleton and skin are unified by light and shade, a polarized scale of light and dark, beauty and horror, attraction and repulsion. Van Minnen is visually drawn to how skin lies over the bone structure, conforming or countervailing, revealing two separate, if not distinct and contradictory, histories. The aura of these works conveys spiritual crisis, a fearful longing, a feeling that, when contrasted to social norms, resembles psychosis and is characterized by an urgency towards transcendence, largely motivated by fear of the inner, immanent maniac.

This is where adrenochrome comes in, as it is a substance derived from the oxidation of adrenaline, thus closely connected with fear. It has frequently attracted interest in the fields of psychedelia, conspiracy theories, and the occult; it is believed to be able to trigger psychosis, altered perception of reality, and thought disorder. The plurality of truth leads to the hyper-vigilant and dynamically confused state we now find ourselves in, caught between atheistic, scientific materialism on the one hand and mystical, conspiratorial, occult spiritualism on the other.

Van Minnen's work has been described as disturbing because of the contrast between the perfection of his realist technique and the surrealism of the subjects depicted in his paintings. They move between the poles of the figurative and abstract, between pictorial illusion and truth, also between the personal and the archetypal, the beautiful and the disturbing. The objects and forms that he recreates with his painstaking virtuosity function in the compositions by contrast, using a distinctive combination of fleshy parts and

fragments of bodies, with tattoos, elements of pop culture and art history, organic matter, vegetative figures, also sometimes dreamlike—giving rise to images that can be confusing and that remain ambiguous and intriguing for the spectator.

He moves within the conventional parameters of portraiture and still life, but in the world of his imagination, what is represented mutates, distorts, merges to metamorphose into a new, more mysterious entity, something that has been recontextualized and left open to interpretation, thus more appropriate to our time. The figures are made out of the basic elements of the portrait genre, but faceless, with an amalgam of blurred, dislocated, even erased human features. Still lifes seduce him, in the form of the Vanitas as a symbol of the fleetingness of life (*memento mori*), and also from the technical point of view, because of the possibilities of *trompe l'oeil*, along with a certain tendency towards eccentricity and melancholy.

He began drawing at an early age, both imaginary animals and what caught his attention in nature around him, fascinated by anatomy, physiology, biology, and other natural sciences. He later became interested in comics and the work of early Surrealists, such as Max Ernst. An open admirer of the style of the old masters of the Renaissance and the Golden Age of Dutch and Flemish painting, he has carefully studied the geometry of these painters' compositions, learning from them the use of *chiaroscuro* and complementary colors, glazes, the importance of light in defining forms. From this European background he has also inherited a taste for the recreation of textures and a penchant for the exotic and excessive in the still lifes of the colonial period.

In the paintings he has produced for this exhibition he pays homage to Goya and Manet in dialogue with Meléndez—the *Nude Maja* and *Olympia* merge with still lifes in front of landscapes—and we find an adaptation of Ribalta's *Christ embracing Saint Bernard*, which is at the Prado Museum, or a *Saint Sebastian* which could have been inspired by the pose of Guido Reni's, as well as references to the work of Rembrandt and other old masters in his monotypes. In addition to recognizing the influence of Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Pieter Aertsen, the Venetian School, and Caravaggio, if we move to the present, among his more current references van Minnen includes Kenny Scharf, Erik Parker, Tomoo Gokita, and Ryan Travis Christian.

Christian Rex van Minnen graduated in Fine Arts from Regis University, Denver, in 2002, and received an artist-in-residence fellowship at the Anderson Ranch Arts Center in Aspen in 2017. He currently lives and works in Santa Cruz, California. He has participated in exhibitions in many cities in the United States—Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Dallas, Chicago, New York, Seattle, Miami—and his work has also been shown in Barcelona, Paris, Berlin, Cologne, Bristol, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Hong Kong, Sydney, and Vancouver. His works are part of public collections, including those of the Denver Art Museum, the Djurhuus Collection, the Hall Art Foundation, the Richard B. Sachs Collection, the Beth Rudin de Woody Collection, and the Ulrich Seibert Collection.

Recent projects include the group exhibitions *Global Pop Underground*, curated by Nanzuka at the Parco Museum Tokyo in Shibuya, *ME: An Exhibition of Contemporary Self - Portraiture* organised by Juxtapoz + Sugarlift at High Line Nine in New York, and *Still Human* at the Solo Collection in Madrid.

For further information or for images, please contact us.