

TEMPLON



HANS OP DE BEECK

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Hans Op De Beeck Takes Over Galerie Templon With Monochromatic Tableaux of 'Frozen Moments'

The show features a compelling mix of quirky invented characters and meditations on nature and life.



Installation view of "Hans Op de Beeck: Whispered Tales," at Galerie Templon in New York. ©Charles Roussel.

Fans of Belgian artist Hans Op de Beeck can brace for a visual feast at his latest solo show, "Whispered Tales," in which he has taken over the entirety of Galerie Templon's New York branch in West Chelsea. It's his first show with Templon since the gallery announced US representation of the multidisciplinary artist late last year.



Installation view of "Hans Op De Beeck: Whispered Tales," at Galerie Templon, New York. ©Charles Rousset

Along with dozens of new, life-size figurative sculptures and tableaux that blend storytelling and mystery, the entire gallery has been taken over by Op de Beeck's signature monochrome gray, including the walls, painted a dark gray with custom-installed gray carpet, which creates an immersive effect that virtually envelops the viewer. The show sprawls across two floors and includes less familiar elements such as animatronic sculptures and elements, such as a string of gray birds that flap their wings up and down while a seaside ferris wheel turns slowly nearby. There is also a 20-minute animated black and white film with a compelling original score, and watercolors that are mesmerizing despite their use of a single color on white paper.

We spoke to the artist during a recent walkthrough of the show after the packed opening night on November 7.

Asked about the title of the show, “Whispered Tales,” Op de Beeck explained that it was inspired by the idea of tales passed on verbally from one generation to another. But it’s also a reference to the idea of staying up late with friends at childhood sleepovers and speaking in conspiratorial hushed tones, so as not to draw the attention or ire of adults.

He also explained that all of the large-scale watercolors are actually the most personal, as he creates them alone late at night in his studio—a stark contrast to the work that takes place during the daytime with a team of about half a dozen studio assistants on hand.



Installation view of "Hans Op de Beeck: Whispered Tales" at Galerie Templon, New York. ©Charles Rousset. Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Templon.

As for the artist’s incredibly detailed sculptures, it was somewhat surprising to hear that the elements often come to his mind quite spontaneously. Take one of the show’s largest sculptural installations, *The Horseman*, in which a shirtless, bearded man on a horse appears in a moment of pause, gazing behind him. A monkey with a curious expression perches on his shoulder, holding an umbrella and looking the other way.

“All of the sculptures are in a sort of a silent moment. There is something quite unspectacular about them as well,” said Op de Beeck. “They’re not in a dramatic pose. Even this horseman—which in art history are often depicting emperors or kings in a heroic perspective—is unspectacular.”

As for the monkey, “it was a very last minute addition,” he said. “By putting that little monkey on his shoulder you make him a bit more human, because you understand that he is the owner of that little pet and has to take care of that little creature.”

Op de Beeck is also fond of adding anachronistic touches he says, like the contemporary little boy, clad in underpants, who strikes a pose, seemingly playing dress up with a sword and dons a 17th-century ruffled collar and buckled shoes, or a woman in a classical-style full-length gown with a partially shaved head on whose hand perches an owl.

The mix of references “achieves a sort of timeless” effect said Op de Beeck, who says he views the characters as somewhat “frozen in time.” He emphasizes that he is a huge fan of color such as in the work of contemporary artist Peter Doig, but that for his own work, he prefers the ash grey and the sort of “petrified appearance,” it gives, “as though covered in ashes. It’s the effect you have when you wake up in the morning to a blanket of snow. Grey is not as pure as white. It’s more friendly to the eye.”

In one of the large black watercolor paintings, a house is on fire with smoke and flame billowing from the windows. Op de Beeck noted that on opening night, one viewer told him she could see the bright orange of the flames despite there being no color other than black in the work.



Installation view of "Hans Op de Beeck: Whispered Tales," at Galerie Templon. Photo by Eileen Kinsella.

And he describes the sort of reverse engineering in painting these works that take place when the white of the untreated paper is the main light source. "You kill the light if you work on the watercolor too long."

"Hans Op de Beeck: Whispered Tales" is on view at Galerie Templon, 239 Tenth Avenue, New York, through Saturday, December 21, 2024



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