



Weird Lil Guys

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It's like Florian Meisenberg has taken one of those coloured sand art bottles I remember from childhood, smashed it on the floor of Kate MacGarry and — poof! A body of work lines the walls. Using pulverised marble as a material for the first time, the works shimmer like a glint in the eye. This is magic for people who grew up on Crash Bandicoot being kissed by frogs.



Florian Meisenberg, *Architecture of Doom*, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Kate MacGarry, London. Photo: Angus Mill.

Impish from the off, the first work depicts maggots wriggling inside of an elongated, Klingonesque forehead. Maybe this is a memento mori, a portrait of a zombie — or of a Zombie Formalist? Critics have flirted with the idea of tarring Meisenberg with that brush before and ultimately thought better of it: certainly, throughout his work, he has enjoyed analogue processes (here, sifting layers of powdered marble off a semi-wet canvas) as much as digital ones, along with an affinity for flatness and playfulness; yet, whether it's zombie formalism, casualism or postmodernism, -isms don't tend to stick: Meisenberg will always be a lightning rod rather than a seismograph. Meanwhile, the eyes of this maggot-brain, which are cut off by the bottom of the canvas, recall the 'eyes' emoji — as if the artist has just said something he's not supposed to say.



Florian Meisenberg, *Stanley and Boodgie in the shower*, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Kate MacGarry, London. Photo: Angus Mill.

At last, art's answer to @weirdlilguys: next to some stone pines suspended above the sea is a piggy balding guy reaching with a tiny lobster claw for a glowing cross in the air. Next to him, a blue splodge with saucer eyes recalls one of Louis Wain's cats. Elsewhere, a pack of dogs hunt a unicorn and a butcher hacks up body parts. The exhibition is titled *What does the smoke know of fire?* and these are garden path fables: stripped of their morals, made lighter, we might actually learn something.



Installation view. Florian Meisenberg, *What does the smoke know of fire?* Courtesy the artist and Kate MacGarry, London. Photo: Angus Mill.

That said, some of the works seem to draw from a more personal well — in one, two white pets watch their owner take a shower. In another, people swim nude, surrounded by stray cats. It's either paradise or Greece. Both of these works render ceramic tiles as a slapdash grid across the canvas. A nod de l'enfant terrible towards Agnes Martin perhaps – in any case, what use is the painterly illusion of 3D perspective in the age of video game skyboxes? There is nothing that the critic could say about Meisenberg's painterly craft that hasn't already been answered with their own craftiness and therefore they solicit some other, more expansive response. Case in point is a crafty fox in an ochre cube eyeing up some psychedelic-looking mushrooms like a dare. One suspects that Meisenberg's paintings would prove just as intoxicating in the art world's most-esteemed temples as they would on Adult Swim

— yet his distinctive brand of slacker abstraction feels tauter the more time you spend with it.



Florian Meisenberg, *Victoria Park (the adventure of self-discovery)*, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Kate MacGarry, London. Photo: Angus Mill.

An ouroboros man nomming on his own tadpole-toe against a soothing, powder-blue, New Agey backdrop suggests that history repeats itself. From their Pic 'n' Mix approach to folklore to their rough, marble surfaces – the stuff of ancient monuments turned to sand – these works keep gesturing backwards. Back to when exactly is unclear – but whenever it was, everything was great, that's for sure. Remember? That time when two trolls lived under a bum-shaped hill? When foxes got high and no-one batted an eyelid? When we all had penguins in our heads and everyone was just chill about it?



Florian Meisenberg, *But what does it mean? (holotropic states of consciousness)*, 2023. Courtesy the artist and Kate MacGarry, London. Photo: Angus Mill.

As a German New Yorker visiting post-Brexit Britain, Meisenberg must feel confused about how his addled, bucolic visions have found themselves exhibited in a country living in an even scattier fantasy world – Britain as the proverbial, self-important fly on the coach wheel, saying, ‘What a dust do I raise!’ Yet, as Simon Kuper wrote recently in the Financial Times, the nation is waking up from its delusions of grandeur – as a country with ‘a special destiny’ – and seeing itself more clearly. To recover from such delusion, some therapists might recommend micro-dosing psilocybin. But for those feeling more abstemious, have a hit of Florian Meisenberg.

By Sammi Gale