

PRESS RELEASE

**Michael van Ofen**

**“GERMANIA UND ITALIA”  
The Continuance of the Contemporary**

6 October 2013 – 31 January 2014



Already with the exhibition's title, *Germania und Italia* – that mimics the famous *Italia und Germania*, from 1828, by Friedrich Overbeck – the German artist Michael van Ofen announces that his artistic journey in Italy has focused on a formal investigation of picture-making that moves from the relationship that his work has constantly had with history painting. The history – and the paintings – evoked by van Ofen in these new canvases relates to the analogies that have linked Germany and Italy during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, namely to the parallelism between the two countries in their process of nation building. The artist doesn't forget that this historical-cultural link had started long ago, with Tacitus' *De origine Germanorum*, had continued with the Nazarenes finding inspiration in Raphael, had become conspicuous with the proximity of creation of a unified state in both Italy and Germany in the decade 1861-1871, reaching a political intensity with their tragic alliance in World War II.

In the works of *Germania und Italia*, the artist draws on both German and Italian 19<sup>th</sup> century pictures or their contemporary reproductions, in order to conceptually establish his iconography by referencing images that can be turned into ruins: the painted memory

of the events which had marked the destiny of the two nations is both evoked and revoked, recreated and disintegrated on the canvas. The historical images evolve into ghostly structures where characters and objects are transcribed as shapes and colours, as geometry and gesture, as space and imagination. Van Ofen's painting has gradually moved, since the 1980s, from recognizable images of landscapes and architectures – created through a dense construction of solid, omogenous brushstrokes laid on the canvas as to inscribe a dialectics of representation and abstraction – to the presentation of human figures that appear like short-circuits of the vision: essential forms legible as a visual stenography, painted with light-speed action, that push the representation to the limit of its possibilities and readability.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was a time in which three important factors had an enormous impact, together influencing the practice of painting: the 'invention' of history, the virulence of nationalisms, the striving for a maximum of verisimilitude in representation under the pressure of photography. This seems to be a central reason why van Ofen has taken up pictures representative of that phase of painting as historical icons to be analysed, disintegrated, morphed into his own artistic project. In his *German-und-Italian* works, the narrative/epochal verisimilitude has been abolished, replaced by a non-perspective space with a uniformly, intensely black background, inside which the relics of representation and history play their last figural card.

Private view, by invitation only: 5 October 2013, at 6.00pm. The artist will be present.

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The exhibition can be visited free of charge during the opening hours of the permanent collection.

Thursday and Friday 2.30pm – 6.30pm

Saturday and Sunday 10.30am – 6.30pm

Closed: 25-26 December; 1 & 6 January

**Info**

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Michael van Ofen (b. Essen, Germany, 1956) lives and works in Düsseldorf. He has exhibited internationally including solo shows in the USA, UK, and Japan. Recent exhibitions have included a solo show at Alison Jacques Gallery (2012) and Kunstmuseum Dieselkraftwerk, Cottbus (2010). Group shows include *Die Erfindung der Wirklichkeiten*, Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf (2012); *Painting Between The Lines*, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (2011); and *Wrong*, Kunst im Tunnel, Düsseldorf (2011).

His work is held at several public collections across Germany including the Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg and Kaiser Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld.