

Halldor Bjorn Runolfsson; Director National Gallery of Iceland, Reykjavik.

Gauthier Hubert tackles intriguing questions about Art History and sociological, political, and philosophical issues that classical art from past centuries inspires him to ask. This is how he rekindles a connection with art and artists that contemporary audiences should be fully able to apprehend.

Before the empty gaze of a noblewoman in a portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger, speculations about what she might be brooding, become an investigation of where, how and what she might be contemplating. It appears to be a small dot on the wall, a lonely star separated from a cluster of planets, situated beneath a drawing, by Hubert, of Anna Meyer, just as Holbein depicted the sixteen-year-old daughter of the Mayor of Basel in his remarkable chalk drawing from 1526.

Through an association with Vincent van Gogh, a former student of the Art Academy of Antwerp, and his famous starry sky, Hubert not only allows us to travel more than three and a half centuries nearer our times, but crowns his portrait of Anna Meyer by painting her as she might look at the beginning of our millennium, posing as mournfully as she did in Holbein's drawing, but worn and weathered by the 502 years she would have been alive. This is how Gauthier Hubert enters into a satirical dialogue with Art History, charmingly convincing the spectator of the uninterrupted existence of the people and characters who once posed for the great masters.

There is a hidden logic in Gauthier Hubert's approach, that confronts us with the way in which we apprehend art in general. Instead of

contemplating an artwork solely as a technical achievement in the strictest sense, confined to an era by its style and by the material limits of that era and unable to transcend its place in time, Hubert addresses the conceptual possibilities hidden within every work of art, whatever era it belongs to.

There is a lot of humour in Hubert's work. It takes the form of puns, twists and anecdotes about particular works or artists that have captured his attention. But there is also, in his work, a profound critique of our diminished capacity to draw meaning from past achievements in art and culture. This is something that pairs him with Marcel Duchamp, whose magnificent contribution to modern and contemporary art was avant-garde in the most disruptive of ways, while always remaining deeply rooted in the classical traditions of art making. Art can never escape references; however revolutionary it claims to be. There is always a thread running between the new and what went before. New-borns always possess a navel.

But this is not the only thing linking these two artists. Just as Duchamp insisted that the title of a work of art was its most important feature, Gauthier Hubert begins his works by first inventing their title. It sometimes takes him years to figure out what to put to canvas for an artwork to live up to the title he has given it.

Other works may come to him in a dream in the manner of a surrealistic prophecy, as with the ominous "Autopsy of Michael Jackson after D. Schultz", from 2009.

This oneiric premonition, completed just before Jackson's tragic death, takes form in a painting of the notorious singer lying on a dissection table. It reminds one of the umbrella in Isidore Ducasse's enigmatic trope and also points to Holbein's macabre Body of the dead Christ....

This is how Gauthier Hubert keeps art alive; not only contemporary art,
but art from all ages.