

Press Release

1 February - 17 March 2018
Private View Wed 31 January 6.30-9pm

George Rouy
Squeeze Hard Enough It Might Just Pop!

We are excited to present to the public *Squeeze Hard Enough It Might Just Pop!*, an exhibition of new paintings by George Rouy. The group of works is made up of single figures, couples and a monumental swan.

The subjects that occupy George Rouy's painted world of sense and desire are as enigmatic as they are erotic. In their soft pigmentation and balanced composition they evoke a classical beauty - the figures in particular put us in the mind of pre-industrial spiritualism or Greek mythology - yet a charged darkness surrounds them: in this place even the grass is spiked like glass.

George Rouy's paintings define a heady space: paradoxical sensations of scale and weightlessness translate the displacement of the human subject in recent times; the presence of figures is at once ephemeral and timeless, ambivalent expressions and contextless settings evoking an inherent nihilism.

At times it feels as if these characters have been chopped out of their natural surroundings and folded into a sea of blue - we encounter them lost, somewhere between Giotto's pre-Renaissance space and the blue screen of death. This part artificial, part absurd, part absolute truth gives George's works an emotional vulnerability matched by their soft physicality, all trapped in the confines of a canvas, squeezed between the margins.

One figure has a tiny cut that is bleeding, others carry a shell or starfish: it is only here that we find a few new clues that lead away from predetermined narratives back into our own thoughts and beyond. We come to feel a special empathy and identification with their hypnotic sensibility.

George's application of paint to canvas is typically mistaken as the product of an air-brush. His seamless gradients are in fact a meticulous application and re-working of acrylic with very fine brushes. This intimate relationship is where George invests the feelings which drive his practice - naturally influenced by what is happening both in his own life, the wider impact of socio-political events and subjects, stories and emblems that interest him.

The swan for example occupies one of the largest canvases in the exhibition and is an icon that has presented itself at previous occasions in George's work. It seems that this work nods to the wide-ranging presence of the swan in cultural history - from Yeats' *Wild Swan at Coole* and Wagner's romantic opera *Lohengrin*, to Hinduism (Saraswati, goddess of knowledge rides a swan), Vedic literature, even the genesis of the term "swan song", swan imagery and its use as a symbol of artistic inspiration is pre-eminent.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a pamphlet with texts written by Charlie Mills and Caroline Levy, and designed by Niall Reynolds. Jacob Wise has designed the poster and George has collaborated with Jesse Pollock to make a pair of benches for the space (called *Cuddler* and *Swan*), and so we find the comfort of strangers in this limbo of muted places, strange beasts and slippery edges.

George Rouy lives and works in Kent.