

Chris Sharp on Martin Lukáč

The paintings of Martin Lukac exist somewhere between a rock and a hard place. Normally, such a position would be cause for anxiety in a painter, but Lukac inhabits this willfully liminal space with a relative ease, even a certain grace. What precisely is this space? How to define it? For the past few years, I have been thinking about contemporary western painting in terms of two axes. One is vertical and the other is horizontal. In the vertical axis, painting is perceived as linear and historical in nature, progressing in the logic of a Hegelian dialectic. Essentially romantic, this axis is inhabited by practitioners determined to bring painting to its oft-heralded terminus through a logic of essence and brinkmanship. Some of its key components include Martin Kippenberger, Michael Krebber, Merlin Carpenter, Christopher Wool, Josh Smith, and even Joe Bradley, among others. Meanwhile, the horizontal axis operates according to a logic which is non-linear and extends indefinitely outward in both directions as if along an unbounded horizon. In this scenario, painting is endlessly renewable by virtue of its abandonment of the historical logic of the romantic model and through being more interested in possibilities, in gaining and opening up new ground, than essences and the closure they necessarily entail. It's a kind of brinkmanship in reverse. Some of this mode's more conspicuous practitioners include Amy Sillman, Laura Owens, Walter Swennen, Michael Berryhill, and Allison Katz, among others. Contrary to the current ban on gendering, I would say that the first axis tends to be masculine, while the latter tends to be feminine, regardless of actual gender. Of course, nothing is ever so cut and dry—there is a bit of cross over in both camps, but generally speaking, at least in my estimation, practitioners tend to adhere to one or the other.

Not so in the case of Martin Lukac. At once a believer and a non-believer, a romantic seeker of

endgame essences and wholly committed to new possibilities in painting, Lukac's work somehow manages to synthesize both of the above-described axes, obliging them to coexist with something that amounts to happiness. It is a strange and improbable situation, but one which he, much to my avowed consternation (as I, for the sake of convenience, would basically like to keep these two camps separate), carries out with admirable poise. But just how does he manage to do this? What's his secret? Yet before trying to answer this question, I should at least try and shore up my claim by identifying these two tendencies within his work.

Lukac's painting practice revolves largely around the depiction of motifs. Alighting upon a given form, the simpler, the better, he depicts it, sometimes repeatedly within the same canvas, until he has essentially exhausted it. The motifs can range from modified grids, full of expressive higgledy-piggledy interiors; what looks like a shield or a coat of arms; and more recently (at the time of writing this text), the poorly drawn profile of a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle. A motif, for Lukac, can also be methodical, such as in the case of his white on white paintings, in which a series of gestures, initially applied in dark paint on a canvas, is limned over with white paint, as if to provisionally erase them. This repetition speaks to a central preoccupation within the artist's practice, which has less to do with the act of repetition as a formal trope than how it functions and what it signifies. Given the gestural nature of Lukac's work, it would seem that expression or expressiveness would be important to him, but that expressiveness, whose value typically lies within its singularity, is patently negated by Lukac's will to repeat that gesture, and with it, its singularity. And yet, his repetitions are not purely conceptual, but wield an aesthetic charge, as if to emphasize, to embolden, and underline the fact (and facture) of painting and its essential structure.

The deployment of a motif has a specific function as well. Akin to Josh Smith, the depiction of a given motif, the more banal the better, also expressly and pointedly serves to bracket subject matter. It is not so much the subject of the painting, as it is a kind of circumlocution, or better, a pictorial subterfuge which at once points away and to itself, ultimately acting as a facilitator. However, unlike Josh Smith, Lukac's work is not driven by an endgame, I-can't-go-on-I'll-go-on logic. For all its humor and apparent will to deflate the high seriousness of painting (e.g., the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle) it is totally committed to painting as a craft, practice, and way of negotiating art history. There is an earnestness to Lukac's work, a shameless desire to create good paintings, which is hard to locate in Josh Smith's work, which is somehow always and already repudiated by virtue of the fact that there is no quality control, no hierarchy between "good" and "bad" painting. It is all the same to him. I would argue that it is precisely here that Lukac manages to synthesize the two above mentioned tendencies. Where Smith brackets to terminate, Lukac brackets to renew.

The same could be same for Lukac's commitment to essences, to pairing down. Typically, painting as essence, post-Kippenberger, is not so much about breaking ground, but rather about running it aground. The reductive impetus is generally terminal, which no one knows and does better than Michael Krebber. Homing in on and stoking the death drive of painting, Krebber seeks to push it to a point where the result is always just barely a painting— as if it were on life support, nonchalantly hanging on for its dear life. Lukac on the other hand, when painting monochrome or duo-chrome, is not so much interested in the intrinsic fatality of the medium than in the possibilities that simplicity can afford him. Unlike Krebber and his crew, Lukac's paintings never elicit strong doubts about

their ontological status as paintings, but always revel in their status as such, no matter how paired down they might be. They are always undoubtedly paintings, and are shameless exult in the fact.

Both of these instances serve as examples of Lukac's rare ability to synthesize two seemingly diametrically opposed tendencies in contemporary painting. How he arrives at this unique position is another discussion altogether. But I wonder if it has to do with that fact that he studied in Prague, where continues to live and work. Removed from the geographical loci— New York, London or/and Berlin— of these debates, he necessarily experiences them at a distance, often through images on line and in reproduction. This is not to say that he is unaware of these debates, but that by the time they reach him, they soften, forfeiting their sharp edges, become more amendable to mingling in a general discussion about painting, which Lukac, as an outsider, or a kind of interloper, is more than happy to listen to, singularly transforming the whole of it at will.

Text: Chris Sharp

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Broadway and 125th Street"
Erika Deák Gallery, Budapest, Hungary 2025







Martin Lukáč, Untitled 1, 2025, oil, and oil stick on linen canvas, 191,5 x 150 cm



Martin Lukáč, Untitled 2, 2025, oil and oil-stick on linen canvas, 191 x 128 cm

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Naturale"
Sophistica Gallery, Prague, Czech Republic 2024







MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Rolling Thunder"
Výstavní síň Sokolská 26, Ostrava, Czech Republic 2023





"Untitled" oil and oil stick and on linen, 2023, 130 × 170 cm



“Untitled” oil and oil stick and on linen, 2023, 130 × 170 cm

MARTIN LUKÁČ

“The Cuteness Factor”
Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary 2023



MARTIN LUKÁČ

"As Good As I Once Was"
Erika Deák Gallery, Budapest, Hungary 2023





“Untitled” oil and oil stick and on linen, 2021, 200 × 170 cm

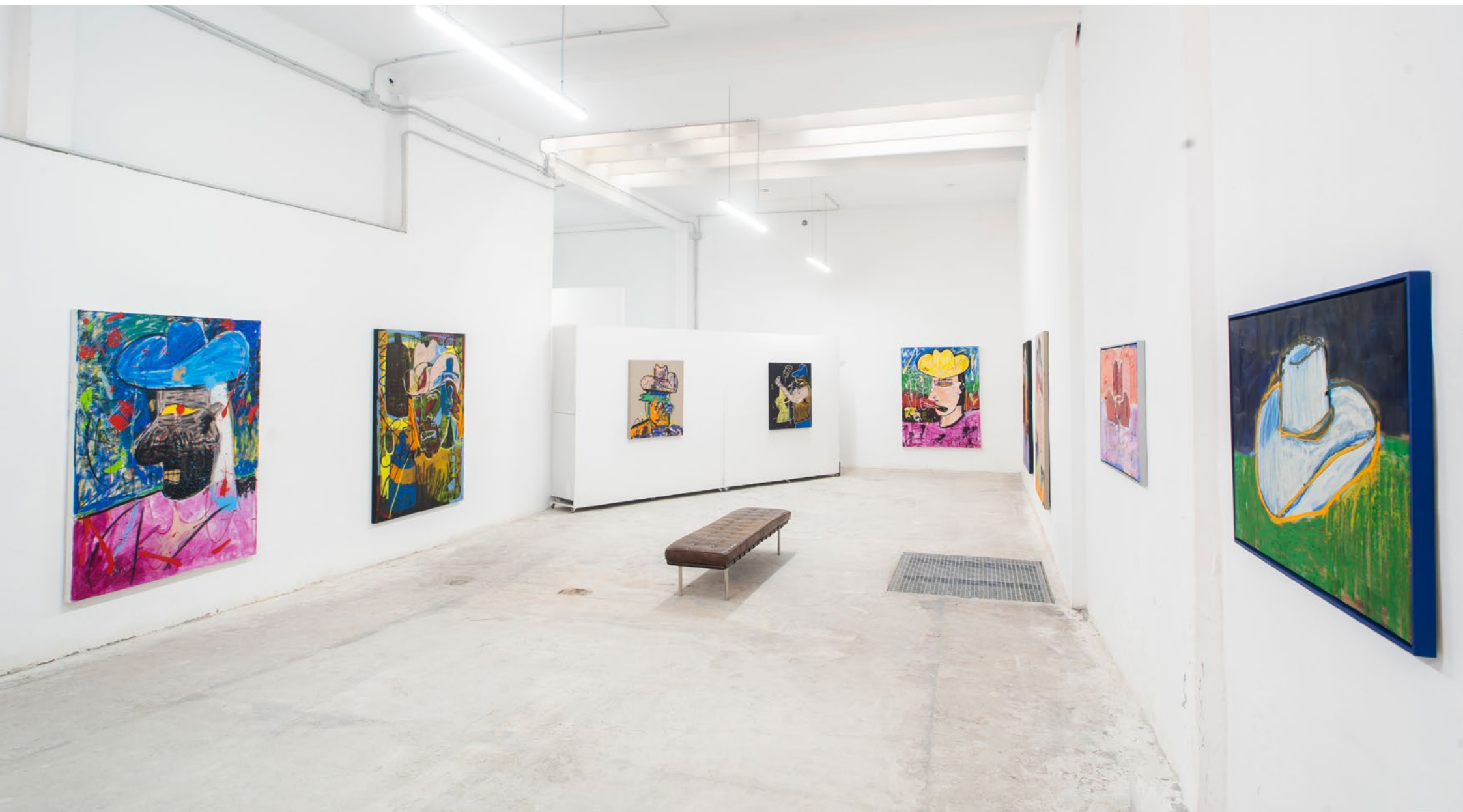


Installation view at Erika Deak Budapest 2022

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Call Me Country"
Tonnheim Gallery, Madrid, Spain 2022





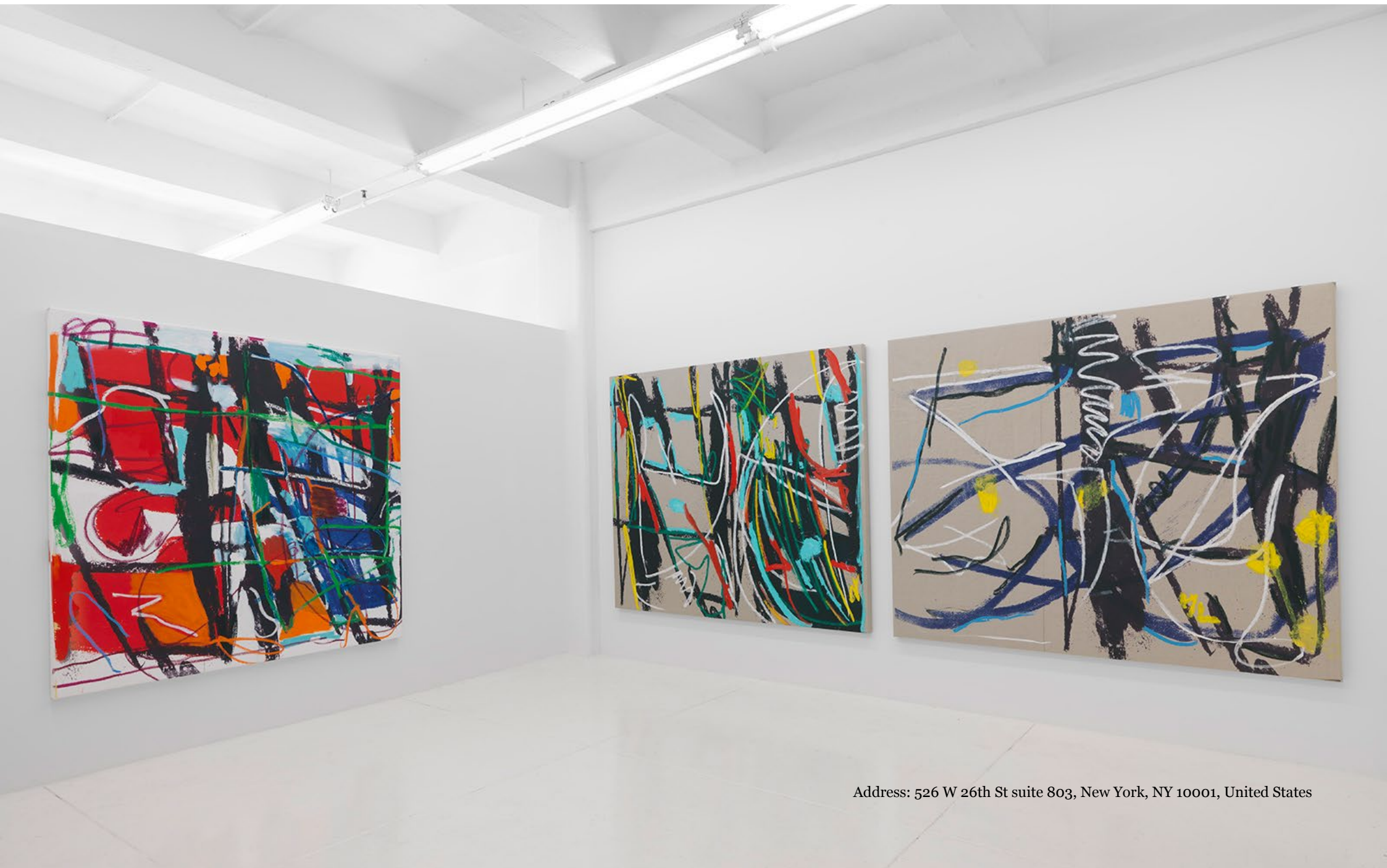
Installation view at Tönheim Gallery



Installation view at Tönheim Gallery

MARTIN LUKÁČ

Taylor Wood Gallery, New York, USA 2021



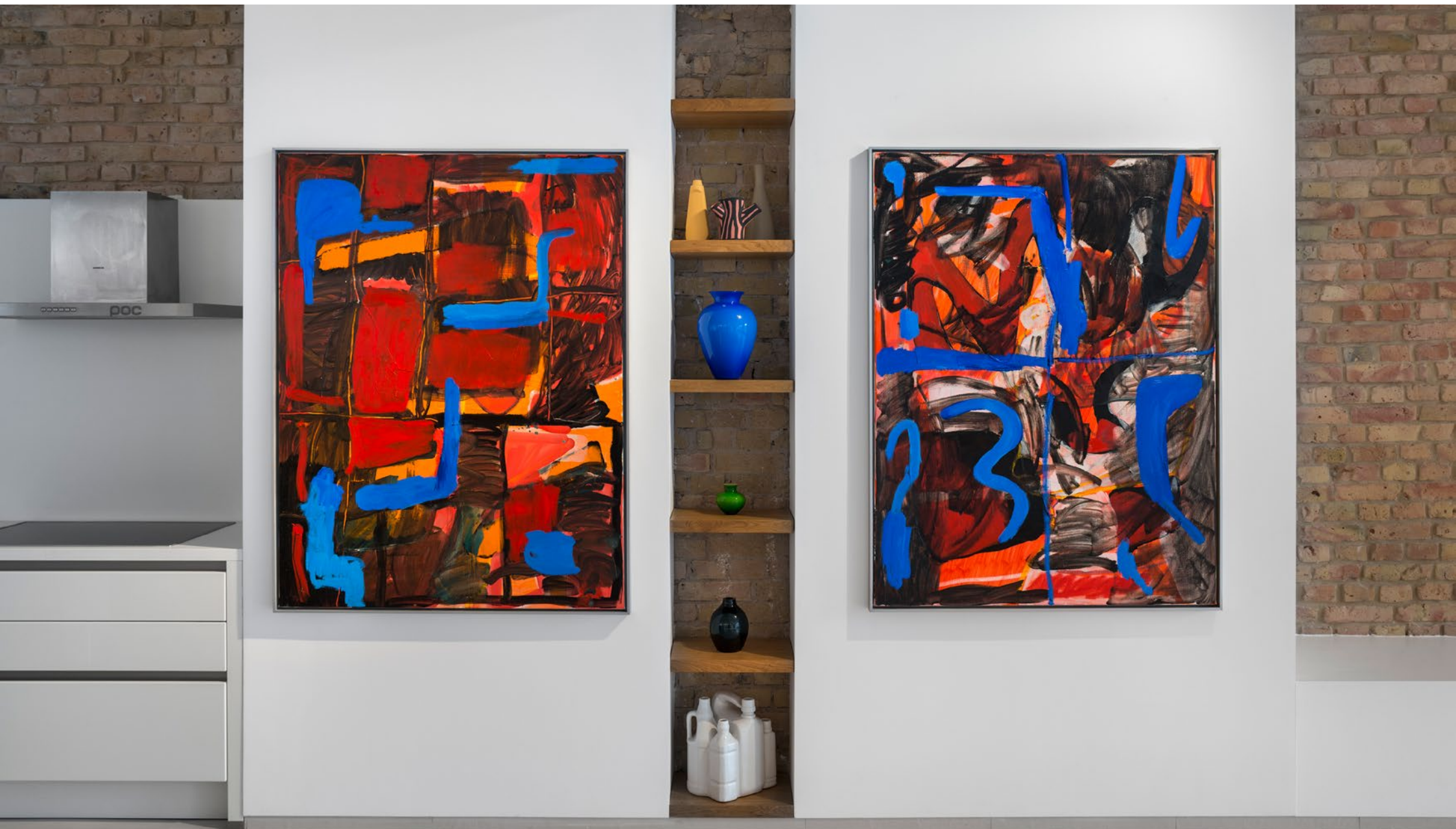
Address: 526 W 26th St suite 803, New York, NY 10001, United States



“Untitled” oil and oil stick and c print on linen, 2021, 200 × 170 cm

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"I'd Rather Be With You"
Duve Berlin Gallery, Berlin, Germany, 2019





"I'd rather be with you" at Duve Berlin, 2019



“I’d rather be with you” at Duve Berlin, 2019



“I’d rather be with you” at Duve Berlin, 2019

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Aww Yeah!" Martin Lukáč
Nevven Contemporary Gallery, Gothenburg, Sweden 2019





"Aww Yeah!" at Nevven Gallery in Gothenburg, 2019



Martin Lukac x Laformela 120 x 105 cm, various materials on cotton, 2019



Martin Lukac x Laformela 120 x 105 cm, various materials on cotton, 2019



“Aww Yeah!” at Nevven Gallery in Gothenburg, 2019

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Collector's Choice"
Secci Gallery, Florence, Italy 2018





“Collectors Choice” at Eduardo Secci Contemporary (Florence, IT) 2018



Untitled, 145 × 180 cm, acrylic on cotton, 2018



Untitled, 145 × 180 cm, acrylic on cotton, 2018



“Collectors Choice” at Eduardo Secci Contemporary (Florence, IT) 2018

MARTIN LUKÁČ

"Two Hands and a Magnifying Glass"
Fait Gallery, Brno, Czech Republic 2016





“Two hands and a Magnifying glass” installation view at Fait Gallery Brno 2016



“Two hands and a Magnifying glass” installation view at Fait Gallery Brno 2016
 160 × 200 cm oil on canvas each piece
 (Donatello, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raffaello)

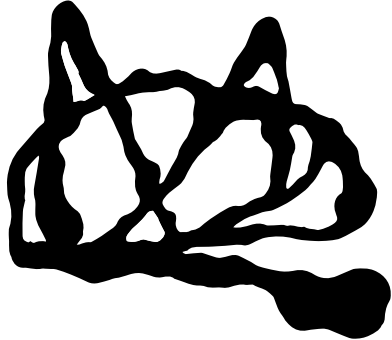
MARTIN LUKÁČ

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SELECTED SOLO SHOWS

Bingin Gardens at Hunter Projects,
Edinburgh, Scotland 2025
Harlem 2335, Platforma 15, Prague, Czech Republic.
Broadway and W 125 street, Erika Deak
Gallery, Budapest, Hungary.
“Call me country”, Tönnheim Gallery, Madrid, 2024
“Rolling Thunder”, Výstavní síň
Sokolská 26, Ostrava, 2023
“Battlefield”, Galerie NOD, Prague, 2023
As Good As I Once Was, Erika Deak
Gallery, Budapest, 2022
When The Love Factors High, Dot
Contemporary, Bratislava, 2022
Martin Lukáč at Tyler Wood Gallery New York, 2021
“No Escape” at Collectors Agenda, Vienna, 2021
“Nevermind” at The Cabin (Los Angeles) CA 2019
Mann in Flammen at Footshop
Warehouse Prague, 2019
I'd rather be with you at Duve Berlin, 2019
Aww Yeah! at Nevven Gallery Gothenburg, 2019
If on a winter's night a traveller at

The Court in Pescara, 2018
MacGyver at Photoport Gallery
(Bratislava, Slovakia), 2017
Two Hands and a Magnifying Glass at
Fait Gallery (Brno, CZ), 2016
No Love all Hate, 35M² Gallery, (Prague,
Czech Republic), 2016

SELECTED DUO SHOWS

Interpreter's Booth, an exhibition in two chapters
by, Anu Vahtra and Martin Lukáč at Chimera-
Project Gallery Budapest (HU), 2018
Roel van Der Linden & Martin Lukáč, New York
Denim 85' De Vishal, Haarlem (NL), 2017
Interpreter's Booth with Anu Vahtra at
Lucie Drdova Gallery (CZ), 2017
Bon Appétit With David Krňanský at Ivan
Gallery Bucharest (RO), 2016

SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

“Echoes” Comma Gallery, Bratislava Slovakia, 2024
“The Cuteness Factor”, Ludwig
Múzeum, Budapest, 2023
The Glass Bead Game at MAMOTH. 2021–2022
“GOOGOL” at Artemis Gallery, Lisbon, 2021
Shattered Speech at Grove Collective, London, 2021
“NOSZTRÓMO” AT ASHES/ASHES
(NEW YORK CITY) NY 2019
I ain't Though at Kunstraum Ortloff in Leipzig, 2019
Les Copains D'abord! at Singular Art
Gallery in Nijmegen NL, 2019
AMARETTO at Villa Vertua Masolo. Milan Italy, 2019
“Collectors Choice” at Eduardo Secci
Contemporary (Florence, IT), 2018
“Connected by the Hand” at Henie Onstand
Kunstsenter (Oslo, NO), 2018
*As If A Field Could Become Some Dream' No
Place gallery (Columbus Ohio USA)*
Den Moderne Kunstalon at Vestijyllands
Kunstpavillon (DK), 2018
“20 cm from the ground” at L21 (Palma,
Spain, ES), 2017–2018

Paper Cuts, curated by Kristian Day, Tripp
Gallery, London, UK

“We are the ones volume 1.” At Carlsberg Byens
Galleri& Kunstsalon (Copenhagen,DK), 2017
Selected Works Bech Risvig Collection at Huset for
Kunst & Design, Holstebro, Denmark, 2017
“Decisions,Decisions” California institute
of the arts, (CA), 2017
“Jeff Koons Recommends: After Shit Falls” at
Kers Gallery (Amsterdam NL), 2017
Dog.Piss.Protection.Attachments., I: Project
space, Beijing, (China), 2016

BLACK HOLE GENERATION SHOWS (BHG)

Kings are Back at The Dot project (London ENG), 2017
Pure Hate at Nevan Contempo (Prague CZ), 2016
Nuance of freshness at Gallery Leto (Warsaw PL), 2016

STUDIES

2009–2013, B.A, Faculty of fine arts,
Technical University Košice
Contemporary painting studio,
head of department,
doc. akad.mal. Adam Szentpétery,
Mgr.art. Ján Vasilko

2013–2016, M.A, Academy of Arts Architectue and Design
Prague, painting, MgA. Jiří Černický, MgA. Marek Meduna.

2014, intership at Academy Of Fine Arts in Prague
Doc. Vladimír Skrepl, Jiří Kovanda.

2015, intership at Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig/
Hochschule fuer Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig Prof. Astrid
Klein, Dr. Ralf Hartmann

RESIDENCIES

La Brea Studio Residency (Los Angeles) 2019
Penthouse art residency (Harlan Levey projects x NH Hotel
Bloom) (Brussels, BE), 2018
BANSKÁ ST A NICA, Slovakia, 2017

AWARDS & GRANTS

9th Prize of art critique for young painting, 2016
Galerie Kritiku, Prague, Czech Republic