

PRESS RELEASE

WILHELM SASNAL

31 October – 19 December 2009, Hauser & Wirth Zürich

Opening: Friday 30 October 2009, 6 – 8 pm

Screening of *Swiniopas (Swineherd)* (2008)

Wednesday 28 October 2009, 7 pm and Saturday 31 October 2009, 12 noon

Riffraff 4, Röntgenstrasse 22, 8005 Zürich

'Art should have an emotional-intellectual dimension. Art involves a game with the viewer, with conventions and with yourself.'

Wilhelm Sasnal

Hauser & Wirth Zürich will present an exhibition of new paintings on canvas by Polish artist Wilhelm Sasnal. He has realized his first ever feature-length film in the past year entitled *Swiniopas* (Swineherd) and many works in the show relate to the film and its motives. Since attracting international attention in the late 90s, Sasnal has consolidated his reputation as one of the most important painters of his generation.

Sasnal's canvases combine an apparent ease of execution with strikingly original images whose compositions suggest a disquieting lack of emotional engagement. His works merge the mysterious with the banal, conceptualism with first-hand observation, and past with present. They require deciphering on the part of the viewer; their cool approach and scarcity of reliable information demonstrate the limits of understanding through representation. Nothing is extraneous in Sasnal's art, though the meaning itself is elusive.

The detached stance that Sasnal maintains towards his subjects shifts the responsibility of their meaning onto the viewer. This approach is similarly evident in his works' cryptic relationship to one another, and in the eclecticism of his subject matter which implies that even the most incongruous things are connected. The deliberate open-endedness of Sasnal's practice is achieved primarily through his command of the subtleties of his medium: 'This is precisely what fascinates me in painting,' he has said, 'finding the consistency of thickness of paint, of colours, that make a painting ageless.'

Film has always been an important aspect of Sasnal's practice, offering him qualities that differ from and compliment his painting. There is a filmic quality to his canvases, their unusual cropping and slick graphic narratives suggesting a camera's gaze. Similarly his films possess a painterly quality, seen in a constant referencing of their material qualities.

Swiniopas (Swineherd) (2008) is an adaptation of a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale of the same name yet radically deviates from the original. Shot in black and white, Sasnal's version is set in bleak, rural Poland. It concerns a swineherd who smuggles letters back and forth between a farmer's daughter and her lesbian lover. Set to a soundtrack that includes music by Elvis, the film presents a perplexing discord of elements; less a story, more an exploration of the diverse influences experienced by the artist, a surreal result of what he has termed the 'distribution and redistribution of reality.'

Wilhelm Sasnal was born in Tarnów, Poland in 1972. He lives and works in Krakow. Major solo presentations of his work include 'Lata walki', Zacheta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw, Poland (2007), which travelled to Galleria Civica di Arte Contemporanea, Trento (2008); 'Pintures', CaixaForum, Barcelona (2007); 'Paintings & Films', Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (2006); Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt am Main (2006); Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin (2006); and 'Matrix 219' Berkeley Art Museum, California (2005). In November 2006 the artist received the prestigious Vincent Van Gogh Award. A comprehensive solo exhibition of Sasnal's work is on view at K21, Düsseldorf, until 11 January 2010, and a solo exhibition of recent works will be at Centro de Art Contemporaneo, Malaga, Spain from 28 November 2009 - 24 January 2010.

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