

GALERIE JOCELYN WOLFF

VALERIE FAVRE *COMA*

Opening on January 17, 2008
January 18 – March 1, 2008
Wednesday to Saturday, 2pm – 7 pm

Valérie Favre's pictures are like an ongoing narrative, picking up various strands of the plot at different times to drop them again later. Her first solo show at Galerie Jocelyn Wolff also marks a 'first' with respect to her work – the beginning of her new series: *Redescriptions*. The title stands for the idea that all ascribed meanings can be deconstructed and shifted again. Favre's large-scale pictures do not claim any autonomy, but programmatically draw on well-known images from art history to develop them into a mirror of what goes on in the world today.

What connects the different pieces shown at the Galerie Jocelyn Wolff is the vulnerability of the human body, which culminates in the show's title *Coma*. In two provoking parodies, the artist re-stages Rembrandt's *Descent from the cross* (1634) in the present. Her redescription of this core scene of the Christian faith - the real death of the incarnate son of God – replaces the picture's original religious cast with a group of 'Funkenmariechen' / Majorettes – women dressed up as soldiers to perform during carnival parades: the sexualised female counterpart to the male soldier. In a second version, Christ is surrounded by mythical creatures such as centaurs, fauns and satyrs. Prominently displayed above the scene, Hecate, the three-headed goddess of magic, embodies a critic of the church as the inquisitor of mythology.

The triptych *La Volière* further attests to her fondness of hybrids between human and beast: next to a destroyed birdcage, two fauns are lying on the ground. The somber scenario appears to be a reference to the US high-security prison at Guantánamo. The artist uses the spatial composition to achieve a collective mental state, placing the viewer within the torture chamber they are seeing. Favre's well-known motive, 'Eagle with the Yellow Glove', crops up again, too. It represents freedom, in a double sense, by virtue of having escaped from the cage, and as an emblem of power, pride and militarism. Yet, its wings have been clipped and one of the fauns has to prop it up with his glove. Or is he, in fact, holding it down?

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A painting from the Eagle Series, *The Prayer*, completes the triptych in the exhibition. Here the bird is crouching on a carpet, impeded by the big yellow glove on its wing. Functioning as both help and hindrance, this piece of clothing becomes, for Favre, a metaphor for the ambivalence of human action: a glove can always be turned inside out. Freedom and oppression have come to be embodied by the same symbols.

Coma refers to an intermediate state between – in the case of the Jesus figure in *Redescriptions* – death and resurrection, and, in *La Volière*, the legal grey area of Guantánamo. Nonetheless, Favre's pictures present us with a glimmer of hope: as long as we are in a coma, there is still the possibility that we might wake up and overcome our fear-driven paralysis. This possibility is, after all, what inspires the longing for dreams and fantasies, which Valérie Favre strives to reanimate throughout her whole oeuvre. *Coma* is an open attack on this state of social resignation. Her choice of the anachronistic medium of painting is a conscious one – the physicality of the fight against its resistance reinforces her conceptual statements. But in all this, the question she asks is quite simple: where do we as human beings stand? Are we all prisoners of our repressive times?

Also presented in the Galerie Jocelyn Wolff: Favre's *Shortcuts series*. Painting in CinemaScopeFormat, they reinforce their reference to cinematographic narrative. In the exhibition, they take the role of film excerpts. Even though some fragments draw on plot lines of narratives from the large canvases, they nonetheless break out of any seriality: hinting at stories that are never told to the end.

Maike Schultz
(translated from the German by Elke Rosenfeld)

Valérie Favre was born in 1959 in Evillard, Switzerland, and began her artistic career in Paris near the end of the 1980's. She has been living and working in Berlin for the last ten years, where she took on a professorship at the Universität der Künste in 2006.