

Selections, Avril 2017



Bernhard Buhmann's latest solo exhibition, *Modern Times*, at Carbon 12, is just the latest in a series of exciting new winter exhibitions in Dubai. The exhibition's title, referencing Charlie Chaplin's famous film of the same name, comes at a particularly timely moment nearly a century after the masterpiece of cinema was debuted in the 1930s. The film synthesizes the causes and effects of modernization on man. In it, the Tramp, played by Chaplin, struggles to come to terms with industrial society as machines slowly begin to cause various comedic mishaps. Disgruntled, the Tramp eventually finds work as a waiter and later as a performer, symbolizing not merely an exit, but more so a negation, a negation of industrialization, its causes, and its alienating effects on man. Similarly, Buhmann's paintings call into focus the problems of modernity, using the very medium that enveloped it nearly a century ago: painting. The works on display are angular and colorful, conforming to traditions of modern art rather than deviating from them. For the astute and art historically informed viewer, the works reveal how patterns of art often reemerge, sometimes even generations later, evoking numerous European modernist trajectories like Cubism and Futurism. Stylistically, human forms are constrained to their most basic shapes and elements. In "Blue Hat" (2016), for example, Buhmann lays bare the profile of an androgynous figure using blocks of different shades of blue, red, green and orange. "Often it is more significant to work with exaggerations and metaphors when you want to express a certain atmosphere or content," the artist said, alluding to singularities between man and machine, motifs that can be found throughout his body of work. In "Mister O" (2016), an elongated female figure is rendered in bold colors, somewhat curious given its use of the word 'mister' in the title. Similar to other works of Buhmann's on display, the figure is simplified and distorted to its most basic shapes and elements. The canvas is separated into 12 panels, each containing shapes that give coherence to the whole. The figure, though lacking three-dimensionality and depth, is presented in profile wearing a crown and cape, creating, in effect, an almost perfect balance between figuration and abstraction. All told, Buhmann's pictorial works evoke trends in art developed nearly a century ago, reminding us that dualistic distinctions between man and machine, nature and industrialization, are perhaps more tenuous than initially meets the eye. They remind the viewer of modern art's lasting and, indeed, almost eternal influence on the present and future.