

TODD BIENVENU – WIPEOUT

For our participation at Miart 2022, we are pleased to present Wipeout, a series by American artist Todd Bienvenu (b.1980).

In this on-going series made up of oil paintings, collages and bronze sculptures, we find the usual spontaneity, grotesque and self-mockery of his figurative compositions.

“Wipeout” is a classic term used in surfing lingo to imply one being thrown off the board by a wave. A loss of control, sometimes violent and brutal, which is nevertheless an integral part of this sport and which the artist himself has most likely experienced, seeing that the autobiographical dimension is omnipresent in his work.

In this series, the same scene is played over and over again: the surfer is projected into the air headfirst, caught in suspension before a violent impact. We perceive his insouciance and fragility and can only wonder how long he will have to fight the elements before getting his head out of the water. The apparent lightness is counterbalanced by a deeper feeling, namely the tragic dimension of the surfer's fall that Bienvenu manages to sublimate.

The vulnerability of the body is an important part of Bienvenu's current work. In this respect, subjects such as snowboarding or skateboarding crashes and, by extension, cycling and car accidents echo the reality of physical changes related to age. The artist's body no longer has the agility and reflexes of its youth.

Formally, these accidents are also a means to deconstruct the image, complexify and dramatize it through the addition of these twilight horizons. The canvases are extremely dense, saturated with matter, and the pictoriality is only revealed by taking a step back and looking from a distance.

The bronze sculptures are a new development in Bienvenu's work: these playlets are deployed outside the canvas in the same crude and unabashed manner.

The collages, a technique Bienvenu started experimenting a couple of years ago with small works has now reached a much larger scale. The pre-painted sheets of paper are roughly torn apart and the uneven-shaped pieces are brought together in a mosaic style reminiscent of the impressionistic brushstrokes. The image they form, only fully discernible from a distance, as well as the dramatic depiction of light are evocative of this 19th century art movement. The close-up composition coupled with the large format render the work both intimate and monumental.