

Marius Bercea

Remains of Tomorrow

Blain|Southern

21 Dering Street

London W1S 1AL

8 September – 1 October

Preview: Wednesday 7 September 6–8pm



Photography: Serban Savu

Truths with Multiple Masks, 2011, oil on canvas, 280 x 385 cm

The imposing architecture of the former Soviet Union dominates many of the paintings featured in *Remains of Tomorrow*, Romanian artist Marius Bercea's debut exhibition at Blain|Southern.

Initially these edifices appear like props in a futuristic movie – Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) offers an immediate point of comparison. This is further enforced by the verdant landscapes in which they sit, an environment where bathers plunge into crystalline swimming pools while others stare in apparent wonderment at the giant, modernist designs surrounding them. However, closer inspection reveals the buildings to be crumbling, the whitewashed concrete degraded with age and neglect. And while the skies in some paintings are an idyllic blue, most are an ominous, sulphurous yellow, hinting at a terrible Chernobyl-like disaster, or worse.

Growing up in Cluj, the Transylvanian city which has seen a flowering of artistic talent over the last decade, Bercea experienced communism only as a child – he is now 32, and was 10 when the USSR disintegrated. However, its architectural remnants are inescapable. The irony of these buildings, he observes, is that their begetter, Le Corbusier, was an idealist who saw architecture serving the needs of a deserving populace. While this vision was quickly perverted by the communist and fascist regimes of the post-war period, which adopted and then corrupted these forms to aggrandise and enforce state tyranny, they remain a paradox, representing forces of light and darkness.

Such buildings feature prominently in the two largest works of the exhibition, yet in these Bercea pursues broader themes. The *Hierarchy of Democracy* (2011) explicitly references Bruegel's genre painting *The Sermon of St John the Baptist* (c. 1566), in which the Flemish artist chose to focus not on St John, but the crowd around him, all attired in contemporary dress. In doing so, Bruegel underscored the shift away from kings, queens and noblemen towards an ascendant mercantile class, a protean act which anticipated the ascent of the common man and the age of democracy. But Bercea's painting is ambivalent about evolutionary leaps; alongside people enjoying the easy spoils of consumerism are potent signifiers of the old regime, the church and even vestiges of the monarchy. A fractured society, depicted here as a heap of broken images.

Truths with Multiple Masks (2011) might be considered a companion work to *The Hierarchy of Democracy*, inasmuch as it explores the processes of the democratisation of art. Described by Bercea as a 'fresco of transition', it features an assortment of apparently unconnected tableaux: a fetishistic blow-up doll balanced on a wooden stool; a man sat upon what could be a minimalist sculpture; a bird of prey peering inside a pram; a bear's head; an upturned trombone; a light bulb. Is this a critique on the familiarity of conceptual art? An observation of its acceptance by a mass audience? In any case, what bursts through this work and the other canvases featured in this exhibition, is the triumph and enduring promise of painting.

Curated by Jane Neal.

For further information on the exhibition, please contact Mark Inglefield
T: +44 758 419 9500 | E: mark@blainsouthern.com

Notes to Editors:

Marius Bercea was born in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 1979, and graduated with an MA from the University of Art and Design in Cluj, 2005. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Qui Vivra Verra*, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles, 2010; *Time will Tell*, Chungking Project, Los Angeles, 2009; *If Through the Copper Woods You Pass*, Eleven Fine Art Gallery, London, 2009; *Shorn lambs fall behind*, Mie Lefever Gallery, Ghent, 2008; *Under 18*, H'art Gallery, Bucharest, 2008; *The Games we Played*, Eleven Fine Art Gallery, London, 2007; and *Lapte Gros and Stuff Like That*, H'art Gallery, Bucharest, 2007. He also participated in *No New Thing Under the Sun*, Royal Academy, London, 2010. Bercea lives and works in Cluj.

An independent art critic and curator, Jane Neal is an expert on the Eastern European contemporary art scene. She writes regularly for a wide variety of international publications and has curated critically acclaimed exhibitions in London, New York, Los Angeles, Austin, Zurich and Prague.