

Irene Hanenbergh

Libertine, Celestine

Opening:

Thursday November 17, 6- 8pm

Exhibition:

November 17 - December 17

Neon Parc

1/53 Bourke Street

Melbourne

Wed-Fri 11-5pm, Sat 12-5pm

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Neon Parc is proud to present Irene Hanenbergh's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, '*Libertine, Celestine*', to be held at the Bourke street location.

Exhibiting internationally since the late 1980s, Hanenbergh has amassed a large body of work which the artist describes as 'liminal portals' into other worlds, and 'windows of longing', suggesting psychological and physical spaces that lie just beyond our grasp. Widely considered a 'Painter's Painter' her evocative oil paintings are personal and contemporary renderings of the sublime in which scenes of primordial forests, lakes, mountains and oceans morph in and out of formation, infused with influences of the Baroque, Romanticism, and marginal fantasy genres.

For *Libertine, Celestine*, Hanenbergh has produced a new suite of paintings, which provide a rich atmosphere of untold mythologies, extending her exploration of the slippage between Contemporary and Historic landscapes. Key styles and traditions across periods and geographies that merge in these emotive works include landscape painting and genres from the 15th through to the 19th century, folk art, mystic and visionary practices, (faux) political histories and cults. Seen as a whole, the new works recall classical landscape paintings which have been erased, repainted and spiritually charged, creating fantastical and otherworldly shifts as brushstrokes collide with impossible foliage, dark shadows and the spectre of History. While these new works do not rely on narrative structures for the formation of content, they seduce or just invite the viewer to become immersed in another world, another time, another sensation, whilst remaining perpetually out of reach.

Hanenbergh completed a Master of Fine Arts by Research at the Victorian College of the Arts (The University of Melbourne) in 2010. She holds as well a BFA (Hons) in Painting and Sculpture from The Academy of Fine Arts Minerva (1988, The Netherlands), a BFA (Hons) in Printmaking, from The Athens School of Fine Arts (1995, Greece) followed by 2 year Postgraduate Research at the same academy. Additionally she completed a Post Graduate Program at The Royal College of Art (1992, London). Selected solo exhibitions include *House of Dandelion & Lohr (outperformance)*, Hugo Michel Gallery, Adelaide 2015; *Argyle Dreaming (1863)*, Blackart projects, Chalkhorse, Sydney 2015; *Dada-Roman (4711)*, Caves Gallery, Melbourne 2015; *Long Live Jezebelusa (the overseer & the divide)*, New Drawings, Ryan Renshaw Gallery Brisbane 2011; *Periwinkle Flower for the Beggar (works from 1989-1997)* Neon Parc Melbourne 2011. Selected group exhibitions include *Painting. More Painting*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne 2016; *Lurid Beauty*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne 2015; *Spring 1883*, Sydney, 2015 and 2016; *Romance Died Romantically*, Strange Neighbour, Melbourne 2015; *Art Fair Rotterdam*, Netherlands 2011. Her work is held in public and private collections in the Asia-Pacific, Europe and the USA including the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), Melbourne; University of Queensland Museum, Brisbane; Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania; Artbank Australia; ABSOLUT European Collection, Sweden; Centre for Contemporary Art, Netherlands; Collection ASKT, Greece; and Rabobank, Netherlands. Australian Art Collector has twice named Hanenbergh one of Australia's '50 Most Collectable Artists'. Hanenbergh is also part of the collaborative artist duo Zilverster (with Sharon Goodwin) represented by Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne.

For interview and press ready images please contact Geoff Newton on 0401024329 or email geoff@neonparc.com.au

At Liberty

WHAT was at stake in this deal that had taken so many months to square? What was in that bundle of suspicious contraband, a package that would, after it was eventually dispatched, get trapped in customs for another anxious, impatient, few weeks? Blocked not at the Australian border, but mysteriously at its exit from Canada where it had momentarily been parked with a dealer after decades of being in a private collection in the US. With only a matter of days to spare before her exhibition opening, the object was at last delivered to Irene Hanenbergh's Melbourne studio; but then the content turned out to have been bizarrely and crudely swathed in an old worn-out blanket, wrapped up in material roughly cut from the corner of what you could imagine had been some ancient and sordid hospital coverlet. And then, after being breathlessly but cautiously undone, the wrapping was ominously flecked inside with slivers and long splinters of brittle, brown, aged canvas, clinging to the blanket's coarse weave like rust flakes or dessicated insects. A gasp later, closer inspection, then careful almost archaeological extraction and the debris had thankfully only come away from one of the edges of the canvas where it had been, a century and a half before, folded over and nailed to the stretcher. Marginal damage. It's not difficult to diagnose the yearning for those streams of influence that form whirling constellations in Hanenbergh's suggestive landscape and celestial imagery—from the *qadratura* apotheoses in Catholic Baroque churches through Alpine storms and primordial or apocalyptic visions of German Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, the melancholic emanations of Symbolist art and even the fluorescent utopian and extraterrestrial topographies of contemporary fantasy art; all of which are elsewhere, or that enter the artist's studio as snapshots or illustrations or poems or geographical maps and geological descriptions torn out of books, piling up around her easel like the flurries and threads and tufts and scraps of mad nature in her paintings. But here was something else: obdurate, irreplaceable, and glowing as if it were a luminescent block of radioactive matter unveiled from a smuggler's kit bag. Here was at last the intact precious cargo of so much negotiation, delay and expectation incriminated by and plaited into this exhibition: a painting, about the size of an iPad, by Adolphe Monticelli!

WHO is that? Heard of him? OK, admittedly, Monticelli's an acquired taste. Although let's be conceited here. This is a taste that was shared by a couple of his contemporaries: Cézanne and Van Gogh. The latter famously praised this obscure Marseillaise artist in a letter to his brother, "I really believe I'm continuing that man's work." And Oscar

Wilde disconsolately lamented the loss of his Monticelli painting, taken by the bailiffs along with a Whistler and a Burne-Jones when Wilde was declared bankrupt. That's not a bad company of admirers. But they're in the minority. The modern tradition that Monticelli helped in some degree to inaugurate was faithlessly unkind to him, at least through its historians, critics and curators. Among the few instances of any recognition he receives at all, Monticelli was treated throughout the twentieth century as a muddy and insipid anachronistic legate of Watteau; as a sort of modest provincial footnote to his friend Delacroix; as an *amuse bouche* to the more sizeable meal of Manet; or as a clumsy precursor to Monet and even Soutine. Just a decade ago the director of the National Galleries of Scotland denounced eight Monticellis given in a bequest as "hideous", wisecracking that one of them, in the genre of a Watteau *fête champêtre*, was "a fête worse than death". That might make for a funny tweet, sure; but as a critical judgment it's recklessly stupid. Look into almost any of Monticelli's modestly sized but obstinately cryptic paintings including the one that turned up in Hanenbergh's studio and you see substance fabulously and convulsively oscillating between liquefaction and coagulation; you see objects, fabric and faces abruptly gush, released from their normative forms in soft spasms, and in counterpoint you see the atmosphere—its psychological as much as meteorological property—condense into smoldering clots or as specks of singeing plasma. And you see the prospects for politely bucolic landscapes, vases of flowers, orientalist scenes, crinoline dresses, actors on stage, elegant outings in forests all squandered into whorls and eddies of excited lubricant spattered with scudding impasto crusts like flowing magma.

WHEN Irene Hanenbergh unwrapped her Monticelli painting in her Melbourne studio she also unsealed a contaminating, untimely artifact—as if it were addressing her across time the way a disinterred brooding mummy peers out through scruffy bandages or an unshackled *djinn* escaping a lamp confronts its liberator with the offer of a wish that can equally be a jinx. To her amazement, it turned out to be exactly the same size—"to the millimeter", she says—as a series of her own works in the exhibition. A spooky coincidence. There's no doubt the Monticelli instantly acquired a talismanic power in Hanenbergh's studio, and that it casts some sort of a spell over this exhibition without physically appearing anywhere, yet lurking everywhere. Can we compare it to untouchable gold bullion in a vault or a mineral lode hiding underground which sponsor a state's paper economy? Does it—despite its phantom presence—confirm, consolidate, even countersign Hanenbergh's art? No. Monticelli doesn't underwrite her work. Nor does he

undermine her. There's no derivation or even ostensive reference that's worth being proven here: despite some coincidental technical similarities between their work, Hanenbergh arrived at this exhibition without any significant directions from Monticelli. In a sense he arrives on the scene of this exhibition in the way he did at her studio, through misdirection, obstruction, postponement ... and belatedly, or at least, at the last moment. Monticelli's lateness is both unpunctual and also terminally overdue; in other words, deceased but unceased: undead. That particular painting of his now withheld somewhere in Melbourne is not so much a site of remembrance, a respectful shrine or memorial, as it is a corpse unmoored from any proper or natural place in time, even from its marginal location in modern art history. This Monticelli work is not simply overlooked or underrated, corresponding to his reputation; we should instead call it alien. And it's as something alien, indiscernible — as an “unacquaintance” of Hanenbergh's — that this story of the Monticelli painting insinuates itself into this exhibition.

WHERE

there are, in this exhibition, stylistic or technical similarities between the two artists—heavily loaded highlights, for instance, that jab against smelted rivulets or across micro-squalls of contrasting hues—the differences between them become even more weighty and more worthy. Monticelli's painterly gestures document a precocious aestheticist passion: his subject matter of unidentifiable scenery or social gatherings is a thin allegorical pretext for the refined and rarefied beauty of sensation manifest in paint's material vivacity. Hanenbergh's subject matter is less easily discernible yet paradoxically more eloquent as a vision of the world swept into an ecstatic liberty. Her artistic motivation is not aestheticist, nor idealist, no matter how richly endowed with art historical resonance and how intricately woven are the allusions and dedications to sumptuous, even sublime, beauty. Her images flutter and fracture and burst as if erupting not with a generous bloom of nature or art but in a sort of catastrophic supernatural insurgence or an inflationary seraphic emission. Perhaps also as a transmission: her images ought to be acknowledged as angelic transcriptions of cataclysmic signals conducted through the vortex of landscape, of mythological and history paintings that envelopes her in the studio. Neither aestheticist sensation nor unpicturable boundlessness then, but visionary charts evoking eerily fuming woodland glades, densely knotted magical forests, torrential waterfalls, luminous cosmic gusts, incandescent jagged nerve fibres, flaring and swelling ganglia, engulfing oceanic trenches, treacherous glacial crevasses, supernovae wave-fronts.... But to say “evoke” doesn't get it: don't think of Hanenbergh's paintings as calculated abstractions—as models, as diagrams or symbols—derived from this diverse topographic lexicon; nor even as an opportune resemblance to any of this scenery. The forms and forces that coalesce, aggregate, disperse and retreat in her paintings assume magnitudes of immensity

and intimacy, of remoteness and proximity, but never align as metaphors for any fundamental cosmological order and law. Instead, treat each one of her scenes as a singular hallucinatory supernatural effusion, as a dazzling psychic inspiration and projection of otherworldly glades, forests, lakes, waterfalls, palaces, cosmic storms, ocean chasms.... Think of each of these as paintings as itself a brilliant tempest, a sorcerer's celestial rage; each painting recording the spectral index and—paradoxical as it sounds—the seismic glyph of an unearthly catastrophe.

WHY

do we need the anecdote about a Monticelli painting to appreciate this exhilarating rage for beautiful dissolution? Perhaps because throughout its delayed arrival and up to the very last moment, that painting by Monticelli seemed destined to be in the show, hanging around unannounced on the gallery wall among Hanenbergh's own works as an anachronic anomaly. Odd as this sounds, I doubt the intention to include it, any more than its banishment, was purely curatorial: there would be no way, or point, to capitalize on its presence in the way a found object could be incorporated ironically or didactically into an installation. Negatively, the Monticelli would have been a sinkhole, sucking at the exhibition with the appetite of a drain. As a positive presence, it would have been an unincorporated mass, a sort of tumour. But, no less, this Monticelli is a polluting catalyst, forfeited to the libertinage of the exhibition's other elusive hero, the recording angel. Monticelli's expulsion exposes the show to a peculiarly dissolute picturesqueness: in a nihilistic idyll we are at liberty to enjoy the paradise of chaos.

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