

ENG

# STEPHEN FELTON

## BUGABOO VOODOO

01.03.–19.05.2024

Stephen Felton's (\*1975) painting is disconcerting in its simplicity. Each of his large scale pictures is a free-hand drawing in a limited palette of colours and seems clearly to have been quickly made. This work of gestures and fragments reminds us as much of children's drawings and cave paintings as of a sort of softened pictogramme which is neither symbol nor icon, figurative or abstract. Rejecting all masterly authority, within the reach of all, the painting can appear lazy and quietly disrespectful of what being an artist and the different schools of art might mean. The painter Hugo Pernet, one of the first to show a real interest in Felton's work, wrote of him: «In the collective imagination, the artist is somebody who first of all has a talent and then goes on to perfect his technique much as an elite sportsman would... Stephen Felton's approach is to deliberately distance himself from this idealized vision of the artist. He paints as anybody at all would, with no particular technique. Just a brush dipped in a can of paint, in search of a difficult spontaneity.»

This conception of painting as an ordinary, non-heroic activity means that every picture is directly related to the state of mind of the artist, to changes in the weather, to the people he comes across or the books lying around in his attic or on his bedside table. Some exhibitions have consisted of series directly inspired by novels, for example *The Wind, Love and other Disappointments* at the MAMCO in Geneva was inspired by an Arno Schmidt novel. *It's a Whale!* at the Valentin gallery takes Moby Dick as a starting point. In these series, the paintings do not pay a tribute to a literary work nor do they illustrate such and such a passage. They crystallize a memory of what was read and the mental ramblings associated with the reading. So, the paintings emphasize the fruitful fantasy of a literary experience.

For the Kunsthhaus exhibition, Felton found his inspiration in the books on black magic and voodoo that he has been collecting for years. His interest is not to cause fear and terror but to play around with the immense database of images present in these publications. Two of his favourite motifs are the serpent, symbol of transformation, and the moon, symbol of duality and pretense. Serpents and moons are timeless and universal. As well as that, they are extremely simple to draw. It is easy to imagine the gestures needed to draw them freehand on a large surface, the winding line of the serpent or the circle of the moon.

The allusion to the occult suggests some guidelines for the artist's lay-out of the exhibition, especially in the alternation of bright and dark rooms. The «white cube», a pure white space typical of the galleries of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is followed by a dark room suggesting a theatre. In his own way, and ever so lightly, Felton questions the relevance of painting today: after a century of formal simplification, painting has to find its place in the entertainment society. Although Felton's radicalism is obviously a legacy of the avant-garde movements, it is at the service of an art which wishes to continue «telling stories and taking the audience into its little imaginary world» as the artist explains simply.

### EVENTS

#### Art at noon

short visit followed by  
a collation

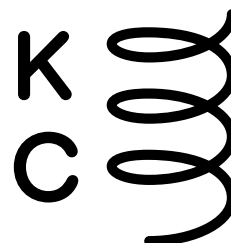
– Fri 19.04.2024, at 12:15  
(de/fr)

– Fri 17.05.2024, at 12:15  
(de/fr)

CHF 15.–

booking up to the day

before: [info@kbc.ch](mailto:info@kbc.ch)



Kunsthhaus Centre d'art  
Biel Bienne

Opening hours

Wed 12:00–18:00

Thurs 12:00–20:00

Fri 12:00–18:00

Sat&Sun 11:00–18:00

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Mme M. Mottier-Lovis

## CORRIDOR

*Untitled, 2024*  
wall painting

### ROOM 1

from left to right,  
entering from  
the corridor:

*New Name, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Unbirth, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Like the Sea, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

### ROOM 2

from left to right:

*Dead Twigs, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*All the same Stars, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Heart beats below, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Unborn, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

### ROOM 3

from left to right:

*Sun in Hand, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Listening, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Howl, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas

*Unfurled, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas