

BALICE HERTLING AT THE FILM CENTER  
630 NINTH AVENUE  
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NEW YORK, NY 10036

## **JULIEN MEERT COLOSSAL YOUTH**

February 6 – March 5, 2015  
Opening: February 6, 6 – 9 pm

The two bodies of work in "Colossal Youth" have more in common than their enormous size. There is something unmoved, marble-like in their attitude. The figures are petrified, fixed by a kind of torpor, in a state where they are cut off from the world; they seem to look inward, with tremendous gravity, at the riddle of their own existence.

The Self Portrait series was born in a moment of despair relating to the approach of an exhibition. The first painting was based on a photograph the artist took of himself. This two tiered process created a window into the precise moment of anguish when the shutter snapped. The artist then repeated the procedure, mechanical imagery followed by paint, allowing him to distance himself from the reflexology of self portraiture. The portraits become representations of a vast palette of emotions, states in which the viewer relives their own experience of the mirrored face. In a sense, these self portraits evoke not only the artist's face but our own. The act of looking mimics the artist's reflection, invoking the uncanny inherent in mirrors.

The choice of large vertical canvases, and the systematic expansion of the eyes creates an oddly optical element. This is a desired effect. The look of the character grabs the viewer into a quasi-authoritarian, almost intimidating rapport.

The Gray paintings were born from both the artist's desire and the need to reintegrate the practice of drawing, neglected since leaving school, into his work. Here gesture creates the signifier, and they are both movements. In Mr. Meert's previous work there was some separation of these two elements, which is to say gesture was contrasted with overtly signifying elements. With these works there is an active synthesis of experience accumulated over several years. The essence of the work is reduced to a minimum. Signs repeat themselves and evoke a psychic universe whose potential meanings are discovered afterward. The images look carved in stone; they call to mind fragments of an ancient era, ruins of frescoes, glyphs to be deciphered.

In Mr. Meert's manufacturing process the parameters are tightened to allow him to work on every aspect of the paintings more precisely. For example, despite their gray appearance and monochromatism, the works are paradoxically focused on color, on the differences in shades of grey, on the data that constitutes a background. Also, despite their smooth surface, many of the tableaux contain a multitude of layers overlying a succession of "failures". Though practically invisible, they add a special and subtle quality to each composition.

- Romain Dauriac

Julien Meert was born in 1983 and lives and works in Brussels, Belgium.  
In 2003, Meert graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Brussels and obtained his masters degree from La Cambre, Brussels in 2009.