

MAX LUISETTO

16.01 — 01.03.2025

Any form of power, whether religious, political, or today economic, needs to incarnate itself and multiply its modes of appearance; art is thus a privileged means of affirmation that no power neglects, whether or not leaving artists margins of freedom within which they must operate. The different dictatorships that have marked and continue to mark the history of humanity share the same obsession with locking down the representations of their authority. In these images, the signs must unilaterally converge toward the uncontested affirmation of the power they represent: the composition, hues, perspective, figures, and symbolic objects are unilaterally orchestrated toward the same goal.

However, the global dissemination of these images facilitates their critical reappropriation, in other places and at other times. It is within this historical perspective that the pictorial work of Max Luisetto (Charleroi, 1975) is situated. Working from images of dictators taken from various media sources, he performs a process of selection and cropping that isolates elements and repositions them in a more confined composition, increasing their symbolic value—something that only painting can offer. A photograph so cropped would indeed redirect the gaze toward its off-screen and unbalance the attention. Painting, through its tactile potential, here perfectly mastered by the artist (canvas textures, ambiguity of borders, light impasto, transparency of layers, highlights of composition), manages to maintain this fragile balance of attention. It constantly postpones complete adhesion to the assertive power of the image. The meaning oscillates between the signifiers arranged within the confined perimeter of the canvas and the unspeakable, inherent in dictatorships, whose existence is affirmed outside the visual field.

Opting for the small format, Max Luisetto lowers his subject to eye level, creating a human-to-human relationship. While painting initially, and later image reproduction technologies, may have succumbed to the glorification of «great men», even if they were monstrous as in this series, it can also contribute to this humbling to human scale. For, as Jean-Luc Godard used to say, «*editing is always political*»; therefore, the exercise of composition is too: The artist isolates and highlights the attributes of power, re-inscribing them in precise compositions, playing with formal and chromatic echoes, ultimately transforming them into mere trappings. Each ostentatious sign of power becomes nothing more than the expression of vanity, in the triple sense of pride, that which is futile, and that which evokes the mortal destiny of man.

The brush thus becomes the revealer, in the photographic sense of the term, of a sham grandeur; the desire for omnipotence that infuses each painting is merely a mirage in which only those willing to submit can believe. Now symbols of ephemeral power, inevitably destined to decay, the caps, cane, pistol, epaulettes, precious watch, lit cigar, and dark sunglasses with their gleaming reflections of an illusory world, are nothing more than the expression of a programmed end. More than ever, «*the kings are naked*»!

Pierre-Olivier Rollin

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