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LABORATORY OF FLESH AND BALLS

ANDREJ DÚBRAVSKÝ

SEPTEMBER 5 - OCTOBER 4

GAA NEW YORK

"I needed the balls to do it, to challenge myself as a painter... There are the actual football balls, and also 'balls' as in the scrotum... And flesh, like human flesh in movement, but also the paint itself is like a flesh for me... A flesh of thick paint." – Andrej Dúbravský

Gaa is delighted to present *Laboratory of Flesh and Balls*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Andrej Dúbravský. Inspired by scenes witnessed and experiences shared during his time at the Laboratorio Mediterraneo spring artist residency program hosted by the Fondazione MACC in Calasetta, Sardinia, *Laboratory of Flesh and Balls* positions exploratory sketches on paper and works on recycled canvas made in Italy alongside acrylic paintings on raw cotton developed in Dúbravský's bucolic garden studio in Rastislavice, Slovakia. *Laboratory of Flesh and Balls* represents Dúbravský's second solo exhibition with Gaa in New York.

Across this body of work, Dúbravský demonstrates his continued interest in living and moving things: animals, plants, and humans, in particular. This fascination manifests in mirthful depictions of groups of adolescent men playing football along the coastline and within the town squares of Calasetta. Although a fresh subject within Dúbravský's oeuvre, depictions of sports, games, and competitions have long been esteemed within the historical canon. Lauded as a method by which one might perfect the human form, accounts of exercise and sport are referenced extensively in both the literature and the artwork of ancient Greece, having notable mention in Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*, and serving as a visual motif across the black- and red-figure painted terracotta vases crafted between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE. A certain hierarchy – akin to that created through the use of narrative registers across these painted vessels – emerges among the teenage boys at play, each attempting to outplay or outwit the others through athletic technique, trick, and skill.

However, from Dúbravský's initial sketches to the more refined paintings, emphasis noticeably shifts away from the sport of football and toward the depiction of the body in motion. The innocence of play transitions into a celebration of human interaction, where both the individual and the collective experience are valued above all. Perhaps nowhere is this better illustrated than in the Baroque painting movement of the seventeenth century, where dramatic, emotional, and theatrical qualities dominated dynamic compositions teeming with movement, vibrance, and intensity. Within the particular genre of history painting, Roman Bacchanalia – inspired by Greek Dionysia – exemplify the era's renewed interest in unrestrained celebration and revelry. Through references to Peter Paul Rubens, the Flemish Baroque painter known for his robust depictions of human anatomy and bodily form, Dúbravský grounds his contemporary scenes within a distinct visual narrative predicated upon the rejection of idealized form in favor of honesty, irregularity, and immediacy.

Dúbravský highlights this sense of irregularity – or, 'otherness' – in his figures by adorning the jovial young men with small horns atop their heads. In further allusion to Greco-Roman mythology, these contemporary pseudo-satyrs and -fauns conflate concepts of fantasy versus reality, theory versus truth. As adopted figures within contemporary queer culture, both satyrs and fauns are emblematic of a sense of liminality and a freedom of expression. Dúbravský's intentional positioning of these symbolic beings within the

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(traditionally) masculine context of football elicits reflection upon established value systems ascribed to young men, in particular those concerning athletic excellence, performance, and success, underscoring the detrimental impact felt by one who does not align with such predilections of masculinity.

In both their color palette and their manner of execution, Dúbravský's paintings on cotton and works on recycled canvas indicate the artist's appreciation of Impressionism and Pointillism. Experimentations with combinations of color – referencing the methodology and technique of Seurat and Signac – radiate across the sketches completed in Sardinia, their surfaces resplendent with shades of turquoise, lilac, saffron, and coral. Gestural brushstrokes reminiscent of later, looser paintings by Monet and Cezanne materialize through Dúbravský's tactful yet spontaneous use of acrylic and oil pastel, conjuring his subjects as Degas and Toulouse-Lautrec so gracefully rendered their bathers', dancers', and courtesans' forms across material and media.

Motifs including stripes and pastel patternwork pay homage to contemporary cultural notions of 'cottage-core' and 'grandpa-core', both aesthetics representative of an admiration and romanticization of older generations, vintage objects, soft domesticity, and rural living. Evocative of the colors and fabrics found near to the human body – pyjamas, robes, bedsheets, and towels – these delicate patterns speak to universally experienced moments of intimacy and vulnerability.

Ironically, these same motifs can often be found on the 'kits' of players within the European League of Football, with subtle geometric patterns and textured stripes occurring within a significant number of teams' uniforms. Like the patterns, Dúbravský's paintings traverse boundaries, eras, and realms. In their honesty, candor, and vulnerability, they call into question concepts of projection and pretention, and offer a glimpse into the world of a painter who chooses to embrace the challenge to celebrate and exist otherwise.

Andrej Dúbravský (b. 1987 Nové Zámky, Slovakia) graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, Slovakia in 2013. His work is represented in the public collections of the Bratislava City Museum in Bratislava, Slovakia, and the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava, Slovakia. Recent exhibitions include solo presentations at Gaa, New York, USA; Fin, Seoul, South Korea; Telegraph, Olomouc, Czech Republic; Dittrich & Schlechtriem, Berlin, Germany; Galeria Richter Fine Art, Rome, Italy; Galéria Jána Koniarka, Trnava, Slovakia; Museum Bensheim, Bensheim, Germany; Botanical Garden UPJŠ, Košice, Slovakia; Launch F18, New York, USA; Ales South Bohemian Gallery, Hluboka nad Vltavou, Czech Republic, among others. Dúbravský has been included in group exhibitions at the Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava, Slovakia; Galerie Crone, Vienna, Austria; Longtermhandstand, Budapest, Hungary; Launch F18, New York, USA; and Dittrich & Schlechtriem, Berlin, Germany among others. Dúbravský lives and works in Rastislavice, Slovakia.