ALMINE RECH

Ted Pim
Never Odd or Even

Apr 11 — May 18, 2024 | London

Almine Rech London is pleased to present *Never Odd or Even*, Ted Pim's second solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from April 11 to May 18, 2024.

Mirrors can be portals to other realms. In Irish folk tradition, reflective surfaces are covered at a wake for fear that the soul of the deceased might otherwise slip through. In 'Snow White,' it is before her own reflection in a glass chalice that the queen transforms into a witch. Such surfaces have long appeared in mythology and throughout art history as points of revelation and metamorphosis. In *Never Odd or Even*, Ted Pim's paintings map out the anatomy of transformation using mirror image as a central motif. At the heart of the exhibition is the idea that transformation is not something that requires new material, but instead is an altering of what we already have. To this end, Pim segments and repurposes Old Masters paintings. Some are abstracted via a duplication that sees identical forms mirrored as they merge or collide on either side of a central axis. These images are formed from fragments of Renaissance and Baroque paintings paired with imagery from fashion magazines and Irish mythology. Their symme-try echoes the cyclical structure of existence, hinting at an underlying message of the exhibition that as much as we transform history, always repeats.

These paintings can be read as documenting a splitting of the self, the moment of transformation where both our past and present states coexist. In these snapshots of an in-between realm, kaleidoscopic arches appear that join the two sides of a mirror. A woman's face, dou-bled and inverted, gives birth to architectural form as the contours of her brows meet and curve into archways. In another, the wings of twin swans collect into a feathered crest, their necks crooking back to meet the other's horrified gaze. Here, as history repeats, it looks upon its own image with dismay. Swans appear as a reference to the Irish myth 'The Children of Lir,' in which four children are transformed into the creatures, able to take on human forms only under the moonlight. References to this myth appear throughout the exhibition as swan-like figures extend into or out of swan-hood. The direction is unclear. The forms in these paintings appear at once pulled into and expelled from the central reflective axis. This ambiguity of movement leaves Pim's images endlessly oscillating between expansion and contrac-tion such that the walls of the gallery appear to breathe with life. In other works we find Renaissance figures tucked under fauna, vis-ible by the light of a full moon, a reference to the Irish tradition of calling forth transformation with a new moon cycle. As Pim layers imagery from the covers of high-fashion magazines and opulent masterpieces, his works inevitably develop a familiar beauty.

His paintings are intricate, with an emphasis on the detail, texture, and tangibility of the objects portrayed. In the artist's source paintings, these techniques were largely used to emphasize and celebrate wealth and to intertwine nobility with the virtues of the gods. These same ideas are found echoed in the pages of fashion magazines, but, whereas oil paintings have historically celebrated material wealth, these pages manufacture enviable lives that might only be obtained through wealth. In Pim's hands, however, their meanings are obscured and transformed. Through the dual process of decontextualization and duplication, images are severed from their original function. In this way, Pim repurposes their symbolism and, as a result, reimagines the historical role of the oil painter.

This appropriation thus injects the imagery with new meaning. For Pim, images like these have a deeper relevance, reflecting through time familial stories and collective histories of Ireland. The exhibition is deeply nostalgic, recycling imagery from both the Irish myths Pim heard as a child and the religious iconography that hung on the walls of his childhood home in Belfast, as well as from the homes of many others in his working-class Catholic neighbourhood. Hence, the evocative imagery Pim uses becomes symbols of a world very different from what his source images intend to describe. Even the finery and opulence in the fragments of Old Masters paintings can be traced to Pim's grandmother who, during the height of The Troubles, worked as a dressmaker for Belfast's upper classes. In Pim's images, opulence pays homage to her work. A chain of reflection emerges that is emblematic of history both repeating and transforming across time. The aesthetics of his late grandmother's garments, found mirrored in Old Masters paintings and fashion magazines, finally, reflect back into her artist grandson's paintings decades later, as he reappropriates the same imagery.

While Pim's twin images extend out on either side of his canvases, expressing some of the symmetry of clothing, they also morph and alter their original meaning, thereby disrupting the historical class and power dynamics that have surrounded art creation. In one of his paintings, the artist zooms in on a small segment of Antonio Verrio's 17th-century masterpiece Sea of Triumph , which was commissioned by and depicts King Charles II with the Roman god Neptune. In Pim's version the god and king are missing; instead torsos stretch down on either side like two hanging arms. The art critic John Berger noted that mythological paintings such as this one can act "like a garment held out for the spectator-owner to put his arm into and wear." In this case, however, it is the artist himself who wears the garment as Ted Pim transforms Verrio's imagery to tell the story of his own history.

— Sophie Naufal, arts and culture journalist