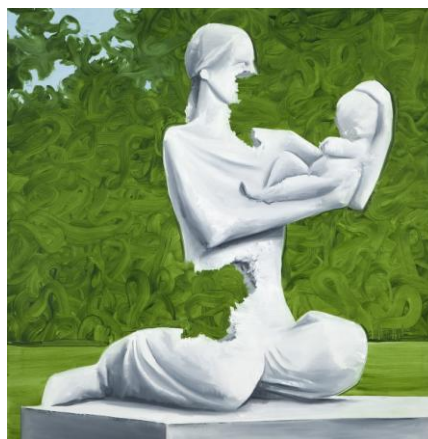


WILHELM SASNAL

09 June – 27 August 2011
4 New Burlington Place London W1

Wilhelm Sasnal's latest exhibition at Sadie Coles features an extensive series of new paintings. In line with his earlier work both as a painter and filmmaker, the paintings draw upon a broad range of sources and traverse a multiplicity of subjects, from everyday objects and scenes of the artist's native Poland, to autobiographical snapshots of his wife and children.

Several of the works address themes of motherhood, reinterpreting one of the most enduring *leitmotifs* of art history – the mother and child. The subject is explored in one sense as an artistic trope: one canvas depicts a stone effigy of a mother and child from which fragments have been surreally eaten away, a swirling background of verdant green encroaching upon the kneeling figure. Another painting shows a statue being similarly effaced, as if by a digital eraser, by the pitch black background. Recalling broken classical sculptures, the works dramatise the notion of fragmentation at the time as alluding to the Socialist Realist sculpture and architecture of the Soviet era, much of which is falling into disrepair in the former Eastern bloc. The paintings may also be read as an ambivalent exploration of Catholic iconography in contemporary Poland, where the image of the Madonna and Child is sacrosanct and ubiquitous.



Elsewhere, the image of the mother and child expresses a personal reality: the artist's wife Anka has recently given birth to their second child. In one painting, mother and baby are shown close-up, Anka's eyes meeting the viewer's while the baby's face is rendered as a blank – aptly unformed and suggestive of unknown potential. Drips streak across one side of the painting, with the figure of the mother half-effaced in an echo of the erasure of the statues.

Sasnal's pared-down imagery and idiosyncratic handling of paint (dripped, impasto or even applied with his fingers) establish a vital interplay of between subject-matter and form, figurative image and painted surface. Notions of framing are also central to his work: figures and objects are often interrupted and elided, emphasising of the inevitable selectivity of the camera lens. Certain works veer towards abstraction, employing a near-monochrome palette or reducing forms to diagrammatic elements. Other paintings appear studiously mundane, focusing on seemingly random subjects such as a bottle of Sab Simplex (a digestive remedy for babies) sitting on top of a laptop.

Sasnal's reformulation of photographic sources (whether his own and or images from the media) amounts to an exploration of the 'mediated' nature of images in contemporary culture. His paintings reject the spectacular in favour of the ambiguous, the tentative and the faux-naïve, examining history, memory and subjectivity as both personal and collective phenomena.

Wilhelm Sasnal (b. 1972, Tarnow, Poland) has had solo shows throughout Europe and the USA including major surveys at K21, Düsseldorf, Germany, in 2009, and at Centro De Arte Contemporáneo, Málaga, Spain, in 2009. Wilhelm Sasnal - Years of Struggle, Zacheta Narodowa Sztuki, Warsaw, 2008; Matrix, The Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, California, 2005; and Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland, 2003. His work has been included in group shows including The Painting of Modern Life, Hayward Gallery, London, 2007, and Airs de Paris, Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2007. He was included in the XXVI Bienal de Sao Paulo, 2004, and was short listed, with four other finalists, for the 2004 Vincent Prize at the Stedelijk Museum, 2004. Sasnal has written and directed two feature-length films, *Swineherd* (2009) and *Fallout* (2010). From October 2011 to January 2012 Sasnal has a solo exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

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 Opening hours Tuesday – Saturday 10 – 6pm