



Hermann Nitsch, *60 Malaktion MWG*, 2011, acrylic on jute, tables, framed T-shirt, vestment, vase, flowers, 88" x 232". Mike Weiss.

## Hermann Nitsch

Mike Weiss

As one of the founding members of Viennese Actionism, a group that included Otto Mühl, Rudolf Schwarzkogler, and others, Hermann Nitsch broke free from the perceived rigors and confines of traditional art-making and religious atavism, most famously in his "Orgies Mysteries Theater" of the 1960s. That series of six-day performance-based events resulted in canvases that were splattered with blood, smeared with paint, and stepped on. The violent, ecstatic abstractions were then hung on gallery walls. Though the artist, now 72, currently eschews blood in favor of vibrant acrylic paints, his practice still manages to provoke onlookers and command a kind of mystical reverence among his followers.

For this show, Nitsch and his younger collaborators re-created, for the first time in the United States, a series of ritualistic acts of painting. During the remainder of the exhibition, the gallery was festooned with the paintings and artifacts from the event, including paint buckets and powdered pigment, which lined the gallery wall and covered the floor. In addition to the floor-to-ceiling canvases, thick with shiny paint and primal mystery, several giant white T-shirts had been painted in austere yellows or Nitsch's signature mixes of reds, then fixed to boards, and finally signed and hung as if in poses of crucifixion. Underscoring the idea of the religious relic were several Christian clerical garments draped over simple wooden

sawhorses. An accompanying video of the performance evidenced the splashy works, and conveyed the intense atmosphere surrounding their creation and the sensual handling of the paint. It was presented without additional soundtrack, save for ambient noise and the quiet, intermittent instructions of the artist, a white-bearded Santa Claus-type presence who doubled as guru and Old Master.

—Doug McClellmont

## Amer Kobaslija

George Adams

In the past, Amer Kobaslija's highly detailed paintings, often dizzily distorted studies of his studio, maintained the somewhat claustrophobic air of art waiting for its subject to come along. Now, as was clear from this show, that subject has arrived, and the transformation is significant.

Last summer Kobaslija was granted permission by the Balthus Foundation to paint in Balthus's studio in Rossinière, Switzerland, and the works that he made during his time there formed the heart of this most engaging exhibition.

Balthus (1908–2001) has clearly been of huge importance to Kobaslija, and the pictures here traced the Bosnian-born artist's gradual courting of Balthus's family and the foundation. He first visited Rossinière in 2008, came to know Balthus's widow and daughter, painted landscapes around their chalet, then focused on the chalet itself, and finally turned to the inner sanctum—Balthus's perfectly preserved studio.

Technically, there was little that distinguished the best painting in this exhibition, *Northern Light III* (2011), from Kobaslija's earlier work other than a nature-induced tendency to allow his colors to drift toward the minty end of the spectrum. But this painting sparkles with an energy and excitement that had hitherto been absent from his output. That Balthus's own work is utterly dissimilar to Kobaslija's seems insignificant. Rather, it is the almost fetishistic nature of the studio's contents that seems to have fascinated this artist: the brushes and paints, the pack of cigarettes and ashtray, the reference books scattered



Amer Kobaslija, *Northern Light III*, 2011, oil on panel, 86" x 72".

George Adams.

around the place, and even the old man's shawl. Some may find these details almost as unsettling as Balthus's own pictures, but they lend Kobaslija's art a genuine frisson. —Robert Ayers