

Lennart Grau *Incarnation*

11 September - 1 November, 2025

With his new exhibition *Incarnation*, opening at Galerie Deschler for Berlin Art Week 2025, Berlin-based painter Lennart Grau presents works that are at once overwhelming and fragile, theatrical and fractured, contemporary and suffused with historical echoes. In his color-saturated, often surreally distorted figures and groups of figures, there resonates an awareness of the history of painting—especially the Baroque, an era shaped, like our own, by crisis, profound uncertainty, and the consciousness of transience.

"Incarnation" means embodiment, a central foundation of Western art since antiquity. In Lennart Grau's work, however, it takes on a paradoxical form: his half-naked, sculptural figures seem to emerge out of airy, watercolor-like backgrounds, only to dissolve back into them in the next instant. Compared to his earlier works, these paintings appear lighter, more permeable, shot through with a deliberate use of emptiness. Grau's painting becomes a dance between states of matter: corporeal, fluid, ethereal. His technique echoes this impression—acrylic paint is poured directly from the bottle onto the wet, floor-laid canvas, shaped and spread into fleeting transitions, with the element of chance playing a role as well. Thus, his figures mirror the contemporary body: a body that, in the age of plastic surgery, digital retouching, deep fakes, and endless self-presentation, increasingly loses its fixed contours.

As early as the 17th century, painters staged the world as a theater, a *theatrum mundi*, an illusion meant to captivate both eye and mind. Grau's figures, too, recall Baroque poses in their drama and exuberant pathos. Yet they remain without faces, without mythological or religious framework. Whereas Baroque painting used gesture for carrying meaning, Grau's figures hover in a liminal space between figuration and abstraction; their interactions and statements remain enigmatic.

Then as now, truths are fragile. In the Baroque era, religious conflicts divided society, and art became a medium of persuasion and manipulation. Today, in the age of "post-truth," fake news, conspiracy theories, social echo chambers, and AI-generated images, we experience a similar crisis of the real. Our perception is fragmentary, accelerated, suspicious of what appears authentic. Amid this flood of images Grau's works pose the question: What is real, what is constructed—and what will endure?

Just as in the 17th century, our era, too, is marked by political uncertainty and crisis. Wars, migration, climate change, and social upheaval create a climate of instability. Grau's painting responds not with promises of salvation but with depictions of fracture. His compositions are reflections on the fragile nature of the image as well as of the body as incarnation of the human spirit—but also of its impressive, inexhaustible mutability. He combines the Baroque desire for overwhelming intensity with the skeptical reflexiveness of contemporary art. Where

ceiling frescoes once opened the heavens, the pictorial spaces emerging in his paintings are seductive yet unstable, their meaning left unresolved. Where Baroque vanitas symbols reminded us of mortality, he presents dissolving figures that call identity and reality itself into question.

Incarnation celebrates the power of painting while at the same time revealing how uncertain our world has become. The works show embodiments in transition: figures that appear and disappear, images that both fascinate and destabilize—critical mirrors of our time and echoes of a past that feels strikingly relevant today.

Lennart Grau (b. 1981 in Krefeld) lives and works in Berlin. After studying architecture at the Technical University of Berlin and fine arts at the Berlin University of the Arts (UdK)—there in 2013 as a master student of Prof. Leiko Ikemura—he developed a distinctive pictorial language that moves between figurative painting and atmospheric abstraction. His works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Germany and abroad, including Berlin, Vienna, Copenhagen, and New York.

Grau's painting situates itself between Baroque pictorial traditions and contemporary concerns. Characteristic is the fusion of dramatic gesture and theatricality with a dissolution of form into the atmospheric. His works explore questions of identity, perception, staging, and transience.