Andy Hope 1930

*COURBETTE INDUSTRIA*

16 September–28 October 2023

Andy Hope 1930's new cycle of paintings *Courbette Industria*, which is at the center of his exhibition at Guido W. Baudach, originates - even if it reaches far beyond this first source of inspiration - from an impressionable experience with a *Bolting Horse*. This is the title of Gustave Courbet’s strange and monumental painting in Munich's Neue Pinakothek. A saddled horse dashes riderless at full gallop through a dark, otherwise empty forest scene. Painted in 1861, Courbet had conceived the canvas as the left-hand piece of a group of hunting scenes, sometimes called the "Hunting Trilogy", for the Paris Salon of that year. The centerpiece of this triptych was *Fight of the Deer* (now in the Louvre), and the painting on the right was *Deer by the Water* (Marseille, Musée des Beaux Arts). Courbet himself was a passionate hunter; during a one-year stay in Frankfurt am Main in 1858, he had killed a capital stag during a New Year's Eve hunt in the Taunus, as he proudly wrote to his sister. During his Frankfurt period, he had participated in several par force hunts. X-rays have revealed that a piqueur (a mounted hunter of the par force hunt) together with a hunting horn had been depicted on the *Bolting Horse* – before Courbet had painted over the figure; why, gives rise to speculation until today. Like a ghost – reminiscent of the *Hessian*, the headless mercenary from the legend of *Sleepy Hollow*- the rider still seems present, for the reins remain taut in the non-existent hand.

It is not Andy Hope's concern to solve the riddle that Courbet's picture poses for us (even if he may contribute to it in the end). Neither is it about taking pleasure in a major art-historical reference such as Courbet, surrounded by museal sanctity. Rather, it is a matter of transposing questions about the relationship between art and politics, avant-garde and market, technology and form, which in Courbet's case resonated precisely in such supposedly merely pleasing hunting scenes, into a very present-day, if not future scenario. The title *Courbette Industria* provides a hint, a direction. "Courbette" (literally "deep bow" in French, a horse standing upright on its hindquarters, prancing in classical dressage) sounds at first like a feminized Courbet, "Industria" points to the technological circumstances of the time. Both are most obvious in the transformation of the motifs: Hope's horse is a robotic creature with six legs, which nevertheless still clearly follows the classical modes of representation, including the stylization of a spatially expansive gallop, jump, distended nostrils, and so on. At the same time, it seems to have emerged from a discourse between 19th century classic science fiction literature à la Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, through Futurism of the early 20th century (think of Giacomo Balla's dynamic representations of movement) and the science fiction machine creatures of the middle and late 20th century in film and comics, all the way to the very real AI-controlled robotics of the 21st century.

Let us begin with the large-format painting from the series, *Courbette Industria IV*, which directly follows the 193 x 223 cm dimensions of Courbet's landscape format. Painted in black, gray, and silver tones, Hope picks up Courbet's virtuoso palette knife technique in the depiction of stylized trees on the left and right. He encloses them by slightly overpainting (on the right partly freehand, on the left by masking). They thus become minimalized abbreviations of spatial description. The horse itself is dynamically placed slightly off-center, its hinge joints and hydraulic hoses, its metal standing mane and link-chain tail outlined in sharp black superhero comic line, the surfaces in silver car paint and shadow black. It's as if the machine beast is leaping up and out of the painting at the same time – an effect heightened by an elliptical, surfboard-shaped shadow set in counterpoint diagonally below the horse. This shadow further unsettles the orientation, protruding like a hole into the space-time continuum of the image.

A second large-format painting (*Courbette Industria V*) transfers the motif of the metal horse into a further visual and associative space that increasingly distances itself from Courbet. Rushing sideways at a hunting gallop, the outlines of the machine can be seen in three elliptical sections surrounded by uniform surface: as if one were looking at it underwater through the portholes of the submarine *Nautilus* conceived by Jules Verne in 1869; or through the multiple lenses of that horizontal arrangement of photographic cameras with which Eadweard Muybridge succeeded for the first time in 1878 in recording a racehorse at full gallop. The horse's volume is circumscribed in freehand grid lines; the eyes as a curved net like those of an insect, the tail like the tentacles of the autonomous machines from *The Matrix*. The net of lines is reminiscent of the digital grid representations for 3-D animation, and the background is kept in the bright hue of green screen technology, both insignia of modern Hollywood animation - a counterpoint that leads completely out of the retrofuturistic Verne-Muybridge world again.

Other, smaller-format paintings add alternative stages of mutation. *Courbette Industria I*transposes the six-legged steel steed into a patchy, watercolor-like forest closer to Courbet, with the horse now remaining closer to the shape and surface appearance of the real animal – except for the six legs instead of four – as if a metal skeleton were emerging from under the skin, Terminator-cyborg-like. The horse, however, is kept in light gray and black, as if it had been pasted in from a comic book. It is similar with *Courbette Industria II*, which takes up Courbet's color values in a more glaring form - but the horse is all the more a monochrome and mechanical foreign body: the reins remaining stiff like a lasso tire around its head. In *Courbette Industria III*, on the other hand, the forest has mutated into a pastelized underwater landscape, the horse into an aquamarine-technical creature, the mane like the fins of a swordfish, the reins like the bell of a jellyfish, the saddle like the stubby turret of a submarine.

Where has all this led us now, by means of aesthetic serial mutation and narrative fragmentation and splintering? Hope does not simply place himself in Courbet's glamor or, in earlier works, in Malevich's long shadow. For all his knowledge and admiration, his adaptations are too irreverent in a productive sense, especially toward an orthodox-dogmatic reading of these artists. But he is also not content with an expert quotation of subcultural knowledge between B-movie horror SF and superhero comics: The fact that *Superman* has brought a six-legged horse from Uranus – so what; or, likewise, that the mechanical-organic hybrid creatures from the pulp fantasies of the 1950s often feature a few too many extremities. By bringing all these motifs and materials together in the pictures, the door to the unseen, to the unknown, is pushed open - and Andy Hope places such a door in miniature form in the exhibition: the inscription "UNKNOWN" on a half-opened wooden dollhouse door is reminiscent of the legendary early horror-mystery comic series *Adventures Into the Unknown*, whose first cover from 1948 depicted a door to a haunted house. But the step into the unknown is to be understood literally.

What is crucial in all this is that the established connection between the pulp science fiction motifs and Courbet's genre nature and hunting scenes does not simply result in an arbitrary collage, the superficial appeal of a pastiche of art historical and pop cultural references. Rather, as it has often been the case before in Andy Hope's work, a deepening of perception is created that allows for self-reflection in regard to the contradictoriness of being art, and making art.

Which brings us back to Courbet. His hunting scenes were long viewed with suspicion by critics and art historians alike, if not passed over as an almost embarrassing regression of the revolutionary realist. Accordingly, there is speculation that the ridicule over the depiction of the Piqueur on the *Bolting Horse* caused him to make him disappear again. The ambivalence of the return of the parforce - that cruel hunt, which from the Middle Ages until the 18th century had served the nobles as a demonstration of power and opulence, while the deer, hounded to death and thus overacidified, was no longer even good for eating - cannot have escaped the avowed socialist Courbet. The deer in the two other pictures of the "Hunting Trilogy" appear accordingly also as tragic, maltreated creatures. The ghostly nature of the event is further emphasized by the riderless horse. At the same time, the trilogy is made for a bourgeois market, not an institutional commission for church or state. So instead of setting up an either/or between anarchic-egalitarian self-image and bourgeois-elitist refinement, between revolutionary image and market-driven genre, Courbet sharpened the contradiction dialectically (to the point of bluntness of *L'Origine du monde*, commissioned by the Ottoman ex-diplomat and privateer Halil Şerif Paşa). With Andy Hope's *Courbette Industria*, it becomes clear that the same dialectics are still with us today, only in radically transformed form.

*Jörg Heiser*