

JD MALAT GALLERY

Big City

Yann Leto

2 February – 4 March 2023



Yann Leto, *Night and the city*, 2022-2023, Oil, spray and gold leaf on linen, Triptych: 205 x 165 x 3 cm / 80.71 x 64.96 x 1.18 in, 205 x 85 x 3 cm / 80.71 x 33.46 x 1.18 in, 205 x 85 x 3 cm / / 80.71 x 33.46 x 1.18 in.

JD Malat Gallery is thrilled to present *Big City*, a solo exhibition by French artist Yann Leto. On view from 2 February 2023 until 4 March 2023, the show elucidates the universal concept of 'Big City' life with its conventional enigmatic ambience inspired by Leto's fascination with the visual vocabulary of the early 1900s. Exploring the ubiquitous characteristics of the 20th century such as jazz, alcohol, prostitution and lust, Leto endeavours to capture the heterogeneity of the aesthetics of the time and encapsulate a witty contemporary twist in the depicted narratives.

Currently based in Rome, Italy, Leto constantly challenges his artistic practice, drawing inspiration from the atmosphere of the cities where he has lived. Chaotic, historical, perpetual, Rome allows Leto to embrace the energising and unpredictable city life, providing him with endless inspiration for his own work. Focusing on fictional chronicles that feature scenes inspired by social realism, Leto has always been strongly influenced by the American and French comics and the underground culture of the 90s, as well as by German expressionism of the post-war period. This fusion of humour and sarcasm, while reflecting on challenges that people face throughout their lives, is vividly explored in his works.

United in their diversity, the paintings in *Big City* offer a stimulating and equivocal overview of the urban and social environment, in which colour, pleasure and ephemeral celebrations meet loneliness, misery and despair. Reproducing the complexity of life, Leto chose to paint what the city represents to

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him, gravitating towards the approach that German artist Otto Dix (1891-1969) implemented in 'Metropolis', determined to recount the social ambivalence instead of beautifying the environment. In addition to the work of Dix, Leto draws upon the compositions of the most classical religious altarpieces, especially in its composition, but focusing on everything that the Church would reject.

Ferociously banishing all boundaries and conventions of artistic expression, Leto incorporates a perplexing and enchanting synthesis of actuality, absurdity and provocation. He states, 'I love portraying reality, but I also like being able to change it. Making something you thought would never happen suddenly occurs on a canvas'. Leto underlines irony and vocalises sensitive topics in a charming nonconformist manner. The artist uses art as a medium to criticise politics and society, yet decides to poeticise and embrace the defects, vices, and a mixture of qualities individuals tend to carry within themselves.

Typically working from an inverted perspective, Leto begins with drawing the scene and then imagining the setting. In this way he creates narratives that seem like surreal collages, in which he marries the scenes from everyday life with an intense reworking of classical masterpieces. He leaves areas of the canvases unpainted surfaces in order to encourage an imaginary extension of his visual story. Through thorough research and passionate collecting of the multitude of images, stories, news and articles, Leto loosens the bolts of conventional rules for protagonists and masterfully constructs distinctive universes in each of his works. Permissive, multifaceted, and poignant characters rapturously take centre stage, revealing the syncretic and candid portrayal of 'Big City' life.

Lost in time, the works form an equilibrium of peaceful and dynamic stories, where the tranquil *Spanish Gipsy*, 2022 meets the large lively triptych *Night and the city*, 2022-2023. As a meticulous observer and visionary, Leto unveils the debauched and overtly unvarnished portrayals of all types of people in social groups, from the resting couple amid the domestic mess in *The magician*, 2022, to vigorous yet utopian and trenchant representations military officers and policemen in *Missile incident*, 2022, and *London peelers*, 2022. Re-thinking the popular culture and recent events, Leto produces a distressing image recalling the passing of Queen Elizabeth II as suggested by the title *Queen is dead*, 2022. In this body of works, Leto creates bustling and private spaces, integrating the variety of characters and storylines into holistic chronicles.

Big City beautifully revolts against the formalities of figurative painting, revealing an unconcealed and glowing portrayal of society. The paintings exude a liberating sense of acceptance, freedom and rebellion against restraining social and political conventions. Leto champions the balancing act between fantasy and reality, blending elements from both dimensions and smoothly disguising the difference through humour and ironic connotations. JD Malat Gallery is pleased to bring Yann Leto's captivating works to London's vibrant art scene, encouraging audiences to reflect upon contemporary society and cultivate the exhilarating and dynamic sense of freedom.

For more information, images and comment, please contact: press@jdmalat.com

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Opening hours:
Monday – Friday: 10am – 6pm
Saturday: 12pm – 6pm