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# frieze



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## Sputterances

Metro Pictures, New York, USA

BY ERIC SUTPHIN

As its title suggests, 'Sputterances' has much to do with language – specifically the degrees to which an artist succeeds or fails at communicating an idea and the ways in which the content of paintings can be 'read'. The exhibition includes the work of 21 visual artists and a poem contributed by Ben Lerner, which is printed on card with an illustration and available to takeaway. It is organized by Sanya Kantarovsky, who was adroit in his selections, making visual and affective connections only discernible to a painter invested in the craft and history of the medium. Kantarovsky has borrowed the show's title from Dutch painter René Daniëls, who defines 'sputterance' as the 'sum of two opposing actions—a sputter and an utterance.'

Though not exclusively devoted to figuration, the exhibition is packed with images of human and creaturely bodies. The show opens with a large painting by Daniëls, *Het verloren huis teruggevonden* (*The lost house found*) (1982-83), painted in myriad shades of chartreuse, acidic green and ultramarine; an oversized eye hovers toward the left edge of the canvas, like a stretched reflection in a glass. To the right is a swiftly rendered hand holding what could be candles or firecrackers. According to William S. Smith, Daniëls 'was a master at balancing complexity and ambition with affected naiveté.'



René Daniëls, *Het verlore huis teruggevonden* (*The lost house found*), 1982-1983, oil on canvas, 160 x 200 cm. Courtesy: the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

The oldest work in this exhibition – which spans 100 years – is Charles Burchfield's small landscape *Windy Trees in Sunlight*, painted circa 1917. Historical paintings like Burchfield's appear alongside contemporary works that reference art history, both explicitly and through more subtle resonances. In Jeanette Mundt's *The Waters Are Getting Warmer* (2017), the solitary figure swept up by a choppy sea and facing a shark recalls Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream* (1899). Bob Thompson's remarkable 1963 painting *The Struggle*, in which a woman is pulled apart by demonic figures, is the artist's own take on the 'Caprichos' of Francisco Goya. In Denzil Forrester's *From Trenchtown to Porthtowan* (2016) a languid beach scene acquires political charge: two white police officers, one holding a baton, usher away a forlorn black man with dreadlocks. To the right, a lounging man wears a brimmed cap embroidered with the word 'GRIM'.



Bob Thompson, *The Struggle*, 1963, oil on canvas, 147.3 x 198.1 cm. Courtesy: Collection of Halley K Harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld, New York and Metro Pictures, New York

'Sputterances', as Daniëls defined them, are evident less in individual works than in the way one reads the exhibition as a whole – in fits and starts. Some of the works announce ('utter') their subjects while others are more elusive (they 'stutter'). For instance, in the latter category, Walter Swennen's *Wind Blue* (2015), a sparsely painted, pale blue ground peppered with swift grey charcoal marks and pentimenti visible underneath, resembles diagrams of weather patterns, and bridges Mathew Cerletty's *What's The Feels Like* (2017), a crisp and colourful rendition of a solar eclipse, with Daniël's *The Most Contemporary Picture Show* (2006), a simple black and white oil painting of one planet orbiting another.



Denzil Forrester, *From Trench Town to Porthtowan*, 2016, oil on canvas, 129 x 162 cm.  
Courtesy: the artist and Metro Pictures, New York

A cluster of small works on paper by Jonas Lipps are hung adjacent to a hallway that connects the gallery's two main exhibition spaces. One of these, the watercolour painting *untitled (13-07-15)* (2015), depicts a corridor that opens up into a room peopled by pink bodily forms. The work's composition echoes the viewer's own physical relation to the gallery, while its abridged geometry and rich green hues speak to the interior architecture found in Jacob Lawrence's nearby painting, *Christmas in Harlem* (1937). Each work on view deftly negotiates between surface appearance and symbolic content. Through his inclusions, Kantarovsky posits painting as a social medium by foregrounding the tussle between the sensuous and the dialectical.

*Main image: Charles Burchfield, Summer, 1926, watercolour gouache, charcoal, and pencil on joined paper, mounted to board, 62 x 75 cm. Courtesy: DC Moore Gallery, New York and The Charles E. Burchfield Foundation*