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Robert Russell's Latest Exhibition Is Haunting Reminder of the Holocaust

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Courtesy Of The Artist And Anat Ebgi

Robert Russell is a Los Angeles-based artist best known for his photo-realistic paintings that probe into memory, iconography and mortality. He often isolates his subjects, be it a teacup or a book, onto large canvases that recontextualizes its implied meaning and implores the viewer to understand the transcendental and sometimes dark backstories embedded within. For his latest exhibition, Russell continues a recent fascination with porcelain in a new body of work entitled *Porzellan Manufaktur Allach*.

Housed at Anat Ebgi gallery in LA, the large paintings draw visitors in through charming depictions of porcelain animals that Russell has masterfully composed against a soft background of purple and grey. Much like his past work, the innocence associated to these paintings come into question when learning about the history that inspired them.

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In 1935, Allach Porcelain was founded just outside of Munich which specialized in crafting small innocent figurines, often depicting puppies, deer, rabbits and animals in an aesthetic emblematic of early Disney animations. One of Allach's biggest fans was none other than Nazi Reich Leader, Heinrich Himmler, who funded the factory and (amongst many dastardly things) is remembered as the architect of the Holocaust.

Himmler understood the power of symbols and ordered the creation of these figurines as a way to celebrate Aryanism, the Third Reich and the mythology that the Nazi's purported. During the height of WWII, much of Allach Porcelain lost its men to the war, prompting Himmler to move production to Dachau, the very first concentration camp under the Nazis, where Jewish prisoners and many others were forced to continue their production until liberation in 1945.

Russell, who is Jewish, stated in a past interview with *The Los Angeles Times* that he wanted to "acknowledge the monstrosity of that whole endeavor" and to take them out of the "realm of cutesy." While he could have made the paintings small, like the actual size of the figurines, their implied meaning would have stayed unassuming and precious. "Here they're so assertive. You have to deal with it," he added.

The solo show comes at a time when antisemitism is on the rise, where just last month, two Jewish men were shot as they left a synagogue in LA. "I wanted to take these objects back for myself, to reclaim them as a Jewish artist, to paint them vastly larger than life, exposing them as the monstrous creations they really were." Harmless, yet haunting, these paintings transform puppies and deer into memorials of genocide.

Porzellan Manufaktur Allach is on view at Anat Ebgi until April 22.