

UWE WITTWER***Holzfäller.Spiegel (Woodcutter.Mirror)***

March 5 - April 17, 2021

Opening: March 6, 3-6pm

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to announce *Holzfäller.Spiegel (Woodcutter.Mirror)*, the second solo exhibition of Swiss artist Uwe Wittwer (*1954 in Zurich, lives and works there) at the gallery (Maag Areal). Wittwer occupies all three spaces of the gallery for the exhibition. The new group of works interweaves historical and fictional subjects with autobiographical elements from the artist's life, forming a web of cultural references around collective and personal memory. In addition to several paintings in oil on canvas and large-scale charcoal drawings on paper, a series of sculptural paint on glass works is on display, a technique which marks a new departure in Wittwer's extensive oeuvre. Also a novelty is a monumental wall drawing spanning across three walls of the large exhibition space.

In Wittwer's exhibition, the lyrical piece *The Waste Land* by Thomas Stearns Eliot assumes a central role. Literary works, as well as (art)historical sources or archetypes, on the basis of which Wittwer immerses himself in intensive research, have always been an important point of reference for him in his work. Eliot's 433-line epic poem features various poetical, cultural, or mythological allusions from the Western and Eastern canons, with references to Dante, Shakespeare, Baudelaire, or Wagner depicting the alienation of modern life after World War I. In the wall drawing *Waldweg (Forest Track)*, passages from Eliot's poem are embedded in an abandoned, black-and-white forest landscape of devastated trees on the walls of the first exhibition space.

In the center of the room, one encounters five free-standing stained glass windows (200 x 150m). In their irregular arrangement, they form a kind of hall of mirrors through which the viewer can move freely. The paintings on the glasses were handcrafted traditionally and carefully by Wittwer at the Mayer'sche Hofkunstanstalt für Glasmalerei und Mosaik (Mayer's Court Art Institute for Glass Painting and Mosaic) in Munich, founded in 1847. The individual glasses refer to key motifs that are taken up in different ways in the exhibition, such as *Waste Land.Fragment 2*. In direct association with the large mural, it allows the viewer to reflect on a central verse from the aforementioned poem. The transparent glass, which is not painted over the entire surface, allows the sparse landscape of trees in the background to shine through occasionally, creeping into the glass like a quiet shadow, and meeting with the reflection of the viewer simultaneously. The motifs for *Selbstportrait (Self-Portrait)*, *Braumeisterhaus (Brewmaster's house)* and *Im Walde (Into the woods)* are taken from the photo albums of the artist's parents and grandparents and offer an intimate insight into his family history of three generations. While *Selbstportrait* shows a young, already adult Wittwer, *Braumeisterhaus (Brewmaster's house)* depicts his great-grandfather's house in Aargau.

Im Walde (In the woods) depicts a scene deriving from Wittwer's childhood, also to be found in the diptych *Holzfäller.Spiegel (Woodcutter.Mirror)* (see invitation card; oil on canvas, 42 x 62 cm, framed) in the second exhibition room, which plays an eponymous role for the exhibition title. The right canvas of the diptych shows Wittwer's father chopping wood in the forest. Wittwer himself stands by as a young boy and observes the scene. A forest landscape, denser and lushier than the mural, refers to Romanticism artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, while the woodcutting scene explicitly echoes a painting by Ferdinand Hodler. However, it is not the vigorous motion of the lumberjack figure that interests Wittwer, but rather its symbolic ambivalence. The monochrome colors, shades of blue, and omissions of color in the figures and the trees appear like a photographic template turned into a negative. The left side of the diptych shows details of the scene as if in a mirror, but the focus lies solely on the axe and the trees. The two figures are absent. Both canvases are primed with black paint, and the motif is painted into the bright, luminous areas.

Further oil paintings in various formats show motifs that are mirrored in fragments on the large-format charcoal drawings that can be found on the wall connecting the three exhibition spaces as well as in the last exhibition space. These works form a synthesis with Wittwer's earlier works, both in terms of motif and technique. *Das Narrenschiff (Ship of Fools)* relates to a late medieval moral satire by Sebastian Brant, already adapted by Pieter van der Heyden. In works such as the *Gaukler mit Schatten (Fool with*

Shadow) or *Fluss.Camp (River.Camp)*, Wittwer works with alienating techniques, such as mirroring and a surreal color scheme with a complementary color effect, reducing the subject to its painterly potential. The diptych of the *Trauriger Bacchus (Sad Bacchus)*, which is based on a famous Meissen porcelain figurine, radiates an entrancingly beautiful fragility that makes a direct reference to the glassworks in the first room.

In recent years, Wittwer's choice of media focussed on large-format watercolors in addition to oil painting. Now, with his charcoal drawings, he turns to a technique that had already accompanied him early on in his artistic work and then fell into oblivion for a long time. As with the glass paintings, the drawn subject is stripped from all color, allowing the individual scenes to be perceived without the visual power of the hues charged with associations. Instead of fluid color gradients, deep black outlines and expressive hatching take their place, charging the motif with a whole new emotionality. The contrast between hard contours and shadowy, softly drawn sections, as in *Schatten über Schatten* (180 x 134 cm), which is inspired by a still from the film *Nostalghia* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1983), shows the multifaceted potential of the technique, which at times takes on a painterly quality.

The exhibition ends in the gallery's small, intimate and cabinet like project space, which is dedicated to the large-format charcoal drawing *Im Wäldchen nach Poussin (Into the woods after Poussin)* (charcoal on paper, 180 x 240cm). Inspired by Poussin's group of figures of the *Triumph of Bacchus* (ca. 1640), Wittwer transfers the Old Master model into a forest devastated by battle. Contrary to the innocent title of the work, Wittwer here draws a clear reference to the famous Battle of the Ardennes of 1944. As if in a harmonious cycle, the viewer encounters the fragility of the idyll in this final space, which runs like a thread through Wittwer's work and finds its equivalent here in an atmospherically charged charcoal drawing of fascinating beauty.

Wittwer's works have been exhibited internationally since the mid-1980s. Currently, the Musée Ariana in Geneva is presenting the solo exhibition *Settings of Wrath* (until May 23). At the same time, a group exhibition with works by Wittwer is taking place there. Recent solo exhibitions include *The Black Suns*, Kunstmuseum Grenchen (2019); *The Spoils of War*, Galerie Judin, Berlin and *Shelter*, Galerie Parafin, London (both 2018). Important group exhibitions have taken place at the following institutions (among others): Museum Franz Gertsch, Burgdorf (ongoing - 7 March, 2021); Kunstmuseum Bern, Berne (2019); Herbert Art Museum, Coventry (2018); Museum Langmatt, Baden (2017); Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (2013); Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Solothurn (2013); Centre PasquArt, Bienne (2012); Tate Britain, London (2011); Museum of Modern Art/ PS1 MoMa, New York (2006). Wittwer's works are represented in the collections of international institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Caldic Collection, Rotterdam; the Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich; the Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen; the Kunstmuseum Bern, Berne; the Kunstmuseum Solothurn, Solothurn; the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht; the David Roberts Art Foundation, London; the Musée d'art et d'histoire de la Ville de Neuchâtel, Neuchâtel; the Centre PasquART, Bienne; the Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen; the Credit Suisse Art Collection as well as the collection of the ZKB Zürcher Kantonalbank, Zurich and many more.

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