

PRESS RELEASE**Uwe Wittwer***Margate Sands*

8 November – 7 December 2013

Opening reception: Thursday, 7 November 2013, from 6 to 8 pm

Uwe Wittwer (*1954, lives and works in Zurich) has become prominent with many solo exhibitions in Switzerland and abroad. For his second solo exhibition at Lullin + Ferrari he reflects his works and creates a group of highly concentrated watercolours in black and white.

The title *Margate Sands* is opening up a wide field of possible interpretations. Without a certain background knowledge though the title remains mysterious: Margate is a seaside town in Kent, 120 kilometres east of London and 40 kilometres north of Dover. The location is a forgotten dent of the British Islands; nowadays tourists seldom find their way to this once very popular holiday destination. Wittwer chose the title amongst other reasons because the English writer T.S. Eliot stayed 1921 in Margate and wrote the third part of the long poem *The Waste Land*, in which this passage is included: "On Margate Sands./I can connect/Nothing with nothing./The broken fingernails of dirty hands./My people humble people who expect/Nothing." Besides the poem Margate holds a personal connection to Wittwer: 1971, 17 years old, he saw there for the first time the sea. He attended an English course and developed a fundamental approach to the English way of life and English art. Since then these ingredients have become important features of his life, and distinctive for his way of making art. Also his first visit in England allowed him an important contact with the English pop culture of the early 1970s. Since then England has become a main destination for Wittwer. English painting amongst others the work by John Constable and Hans Holbein the Younger, the excellent collections in London, particularly the one of The National Gallery, are crucial points of reference for Wittwer's art.

A major aspect of Wittwer's work is the idea of creating an ongoing oeuvre. His oeuvre is never accomplished, but he works from one picture to the next on an overall concept of image-making. Between the different groups of works exist relations and connections, but also frictions. Wittwer calls watercolour the little sister of painting, who never forgives mistakes, and therefore requires an analytical planning. A stroke wrongly placed inflicts an irrecoverable damage on the composition of the sheet. Wittwer refers to the blank spots in the watercolours of Paul Cézanne and Paul Klee. Each watercolour has to be conceived before Wittwer starts with it. One of the biggest challenges in watercolour is the white sheet of the paper. In oil painting Wittwer can avoid the white canvas by applying a red primer, *Caput Mortuum* – in the exhibition *Caput Mortuum* emerges in the main room as wall colour. Wittwer doesn't paint over the paper in watercolour it shines bright white and is pivotal in the conception of the work

In the exhibition *Margate Sands* Wittwer explores personal considerations of memories. In his simultaneous show *The Letter* in the Galerie Judin in Berlin (until 23 November 2013) Wittwer already activated for the first time his family history by opening up photo albums and archive boxes of his parents and grandparents. In both exhibitions he explores from a very private point of view questions of sensitisation and memory. Compared to the show in Berlin the show in Zurich holds an even more personal hue: Wittwer used for his watercolours in Zurich many autobiographical images as a starting point. Like in earlier series of works, for example the images of *American Camps* in the Vietnam War or of unknown families from the internet Wittwer reconsiders to what extent memory is delusive and how privacy and publicity are related to each other.

With the directly on the wall pasted large inkjet *Dreamland* in the first room of the gallery Wittwer anchors the exhibition locally as well as thematically. The entrance building to the amusement park in Margate is rendered apparitional; a land of dreams with movies, a scenic railway (roller coaster), a big wheel, and in the early seventies squash grounds, skate ring, and even a zoo. Dreamland was

not very successful and closed to the public in 2005. Since then attempts are undertaken to rejuvenate the amusement park. On the small wall in the entrance room hangs programmatically a group of four oil drawings on paper called *The Sleeper* from 1991. In these works Wittwer rendered early in his career a dream-awake-condition, which is determinant for the mood of the series of new watercolours in the main room of the gallery. There the watercolour *The Wave*, a depiction of the burnt roller coaster in "Dreamland" opens the series of works. The title might refer to Wittwer's first observation of a wave on the shore in Margate and might – symbolically speaking – let the wave of memories flow into the exhibition space.

A crucial work in the exhibition is the depiction of a sleeping boy – an image which has a pendant in Wittwer's Berlin show. It is the first self-portrait of the artist. As a seven year old he sleeps on a strongly patterned carpet. The pattern is a central, recurring feature in Wittwer's repertory and leads over to a small, very dense watercolour, which is lapidary titled with the London address *Maresfield Gardens*. To this place in Hampstead in North London escaped the Freud family from Vienna after the National Socialist took power in Austria in 1938. Today the Freud Museum is situated there and holds as one of its main attractions the original psychoanalytic couch of Sigmund Freud covered by oriental carpets. Wittwer focuses in this amazing watercolour on the condensed depiction of the enigmatic couch. Beside this work hangs the image of a cloud formation in *August 1994* – a reminiscence to the English painter John Constable (1776-1837), especially to his aim to capture the changing formation of clouds. Next to the landscape hangs prominently *The Player, Camp*. The title indicates, that the work belongs to the series of American camp images from the Vietnam War, a subject Wittwer deals with for some time. Blindfolded the player lays up cards and appears in this strange occupation as a superior, visionary figure of destiny. The watercolour *Live at Leeds* renders the 1970 released record by the band "The Who", slightly enlarged and distorted. It is noticeable that as on the original record the painted cover lacks any description. The depiction is an homage to this seminal recording for English pop culture. The night piece *Great Eastern Street* shows a main street in London's East End. Already during his stay in Margate London had a huge appeal to Wittwer; a fascination the Capital has never lost. East London was the first destination for immigrants and holds because of the docks a rough mood. With white omissions Wittwer imitates on the watercolour damages to the paper and places the depiction in the indecision between approximation and alienation.

The work *Ballroom* focuses on a touching scene in the movie *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) by Sidney Pollack. In a cinematographic wide format the two main actors Jane Fonda and Michael Sarrazin are rendered in a close embrace. *Ballroom* establishes a connection to Margate as it could be situated in the famous pier of the once popular seaside resort.

A window opens the view on the iconic landscape in the Bernese Oberland with the three mountains Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau. On sunny days Wittwer could see this amazing panorama from his earlier places of domicile Berne and Burgdorf. Here the mountains can barely be detected through a patterned curtain, which places the mountains on a distant stage.

Next to the work *Stage* hangs as a final point but also at the same time as a new starting point of the exhibition the landscape *Margate Negative*. So to speak back-to-back to the large inkjet *Dreamland* this work shows in a negative reversal the entrance building to Dreamland and a multi-storey building close to the amusement park.

The exhibition opens to the public a wide field of possible interpretations. The show is not to be read with a dialectical key, but each visitor has to create on his own references, narratives and contradictions between the single watercolours. Wittwer states, that emotions have been important in the process of making the works. In *Margate Sands* Wittwer transforms in an amazing way personal experiences into general observations and statements. Through an associative contemplation of the works the viewer gains many layers of meaning and moments of deep understanding.

The opening reception takes place Thursday, 7 November 2013 from 6 to 8pm. The artist will be present. For further information and images please contact the gallery, Lullin + Ferrari, Limmatstrasse 214, CH-8005 Zürich, t. +41 43 205 2607, info@lullinferrari.com, www.lullinferrari.com
Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday, noon to 6 pm, Saturday 11 to 5 pm, and by appointment