

Press Release**Slawomir Elsner***Narcissus and Echo*

27 October – 2 December 2017

Opening reception: Thursday, 26 October 2017, from 6 to 8 pm

We are delighted to show new works on paper by Slawomir Elsner (*1976 in Wodzisław Śląski, Poland, lives and works in Berlin) in his first solo exhibition in the gallery. 2015 we showed appropriations after Old Masters by Elsner in a double exhibition with Uwe Wittwer. 2016 followed in the group exhibition *In-Between | Calendar* works from the series *Just Watercolors* and now Elsner develops an exciting show with works from both groups of works, a new series of watercolors and a new group of crayon drawings.

The title of the show *Narcissus and Echo* alludes to the moment of an encounter. The myth of Narcissus and the one of Echo unfold the double impossibility of an approach: Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection and Echo is punished by Hera by taking her voice, because she told her entertaining stories to distract her so that Zeus, her husband, could pursue his amorous adventures. Therefore Echo can't confess Narcissus her love, as she can only repeat the last words directed towards her and Narcissus is unable to love someone, as he only loves himself.

In the first room of the gallery hang a large watercolor from the series *Nachtstücke* (Night Pieces) depicting the constellation of the Small Bear and an appropriation of the *Narcissus* (after Caravaggio), which Elsner captured with numerous crayon lines. The large watercolor amazes through its accurate account of a night sky, which Elsner accomplished with recurring layers of color and precisely composed gaps.

In the shimmering appropriation Elsner manages to catch Caravaggio's stunning composition of the Narcissus: The youth leans over the surface of the water, sees himself, falls in love with himself and notices nobody else around him anymore. The doubling of the figure, the inescapability of one's self is an allegory of the narcissistic basic impulse. Narcissus is pushed into the image field and there is no possibility to escape. In the crayon work Elsner manages to catch precisely the color range of Caravaggio. Elsner works, as did the painter Caravaggio in layers. He covers the whole sheet with the layers of crayon and obtains multidimensionality.

In the main room of the gallery a group of watercolors welcomes the viewers. They are like pearls strung on the wall and created following the same principle: Elsner applies in a daily repetition a layer of watercolor evenly onto a laying sheet of paper. In the drying process the color particles disseminate on the sheet of paper. Through the surface energy and the differently set color application emanate patterns and nuances. Often more color settles in the margins because of the tension of the paper, therefore the inner area seems to glow from inside. In these sheets Elsner applies a principle of controlled coincidence.

To the right of the group of watercolors follows a second crayon drawing after Caravaggio. This time it is an adaption of an early work from 1590 of the baroque artist. It depicts a youth caring a basket of fruits. The green and red colors in the fruit basket harmonize with the color range of the watercolors. Opposite of the Caravaggio hangs a large square watercolor in blue hues, which constitutes through

the color graduation the illusion of a curtain. The public is reflected in the watercolor and depending on the angle of view one sees in the reflection the Narcissus of the first room.

In the middle of the wall hangs an adaption of a portrait of the beautiful Ginevra de' Benci after Leonardo da Vinci. In the appropriation the Italian lady seems dollish; however one can recognize in the hatchings her beauty, her eyes and her gaze. To her right follows the portrait of a young unknown man, looking over his left shoulder and holding a document. One can't completely resist the assumption that the artist of the exhibition, Slawomir Elsner, has unconsciously depicted himself. On the front wall a turquoise, watercolor glowing from inside completes the group of works. The beholder can dive into the work.

The crayon works as well as the watercolors from the different series hold an apparent contradiction: Through their artisanal fabrication the personal style of the artist is not pronounced, on the contrary through the careful even application of watercolor and the repeated fixing of lines Slawomir Elsner nearly negates personal style, his "hand". Accurately the curator Michael Hering characterized another feature of Slawomir Elsner's crayon drawings after famous paintings from art history: "The most accurate precision in drawing achieves formally the most evident blurring." It seems as the images would be behind translucent glass and the contours would blur even the sharp lines are drawn with outmost precision.

At the exit of the gallery hang in one of the corners two further crayon drawings which seem not to belong to the group of appropriations and which might have been missed entering the gallery. Their workmanship is comparable to the adaption after Old Masters but the two images are not appropriation from the Musée imaginaire of Slawomir Elsner but are based on images from Instagram. Depicted are a young naked man with a beer bottle sitting on a bed and a young woman putting on lipstick in front of a mirror. The titles *Histoires d'amour 1* and *2*, their identical dimensions and the arrangement of the two works puts them into a relation with regards to contempt. Is it a couple, lovers maybe? Here appears maybe a criticism of society in Elsner's œuvre which might not be apparent on first sight. Do these two works refer to the social isolation of mankind in the digital world? Do two people – probably digital natives – find each other in a from narcissism affected world? The handcrafted element in Elsner's art seems to contrast strongly to the virtual reality surrounding us, interfering any communication. One can only hope that the contemporary Narcissus and the trendy Echo will find the right words.

The opening reception takes place on Thursday 26 October 2017 from 6 to 8pm. The artist will be present. For further information and image material please contact the gallery Lullin + Ferrari, Limmatstr. 214, CH-8005 Zürich, t. +41 43 205 26 07, info@lullinferrari.com, www.lullinferrari.com

Solo exhibitions (selection 2017 to 2014) 2017 *Cranach²*, Museen Böttcherstrasse, Paula Modersohn-Becker Museum and Ludwig Roselius Museum, Bremen | 2016 *Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt*, Galerie Gisela Clement, Galeriehaus, Bonn / *Kupfer – Silber Gold*, Galerie Gebr. Lehmann, Dresden | 2015 *Abraham – Ovid – das Andere* (with Uwe Wittwer), Lullin + Ferrari, Zürich / *Nichts ist wie es scheint*, Hospitalhof, Stuttgart / *View from the Depths of the Eye* (with Zbigniew Rogalski), Galeria Raster, Warschau | 2014 *Muse Muse* (with Bernhard Brungs) | Group exhibitions (selection 2017) *Works & Leisure*, The Cube, Eschborn / *VERMISST Der Turm der Blauen Pferde von Franz Marc*, Pinakothek der Moderne, Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich