

PRESS RELEASE**Sebastian Utzni***17.71% Confetti*

31 August – 5 October 2019

Opening reception: Friday, 30 August 2019, 6 to 9pm

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We are very happy to present the first exhibition by Sebastian Utzni (*1981 Augsburg, DE) in our gallery. Utzni is a conceptual artist mastering a great number of possibilities to make art. He impressively unfolds these in the exhibition in five different groups of works.

A pinball machine transforms the first room of the gallery into a games room. On closer inspection, the visitors realize that this pinball machine does not feature the usual subjects from popular culture, such as Ghostbusters, Dolly Parton, AC/DC, etc. on the game layout, but rather terms that originate from the art world. Utzni has meticulously built a variant of a pinball machine. Its complete redesign is based on a representation reminiscent of diagrams of management models to which Utzni referred to in earlier works. The pinball machine is a 1970s model completely redesigned by Utzni. In the terminology of Marcel Duchamp Utzni created an "assisted ready-made". The four players are called Artist, Gallerist, Auctioneer and Collector – important participants in the art world. Many other ingredients of the art world are mentioned: Commitment, Prediction, Advance, Mission and Integrity accompany the black ball of fate through the start channel. Then it's on to benevolence, prices and the imponderables of the market. Excitement and change are not absent, fame and success come and happiness is needed. The fake marble cladding enhances the pinball machine and gives it a distinction that all artists strive for in order to achieve *VALUE VALUE VALUE*, the title of the work. Utzni transformed the pinball machine into an existential machine of the art business.

Three *Prediction Paintings* accompany the pinball machine in the first room. Utzni asked various actors in the art world which paintings they think will achieve record sales in 2019. He then used a computer program to analyze the colors used in these paintings. The program filtered five colors out of their color spectrum. Similar colors were combined until five remained. The program uses the color system of the 1625 standardized RAL colors. The upper half of the *Prediction Paintings* is to be read like info-graphics: The size of the circle indicates the frequency of the color used. Since each RAL color is assigned a unique number and a description, the percentage use and the name of the colors can be read in the lower part. The wording of the analysis reads like bot poetry – here a part of the description for colors used in Nildeka Akunvili Crosby's picture: "[...] 20.80% dark dirty moss olive green, 17.71% confetti, 5.96% dark barista crater echo felix [...]". Utzni's approach is not only critical of the art market – his attitude is rather that of a neutral scientific observer who, in high-gloss works in lacquer paint on a champagne chalk ground, lets the beauty of painting appear in color dots.

In the main room, the audience is welcomed by an installation with a large number of postcards depicting Arab youths. The pictures are attached to a red thread above the heads of the visitors. The work is called *Jeunes Arabes* and is based on the history of the "Muhammad Painting": According to a legend, the so-called Muhammad painting is a picture that the Christian monk Bahira painted from memory after meeting the Prophet Muhammad when he was between 9 and 12 years old. The portrait is produced and sold as a poster in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The source for the poster (and the painting), however, is a photograph on a postcard from Lehnert & Landrock, which must have been taken in Tunisia between 1904 and 1906. It was published as a postcard with the postcard number 106 under the title "Mohammed" or "Ahmed". Later the same photo was colored under the postcard number 760 and distributed with the title "Jeune arabe". How the picture could then become a poster in Iran is unclear. A framed version of the poster can be found in the shop

window of the Imam Khomeini Museum – it is said to have been one of his favorite paintings. Utzni is interested in the many different levels, twists and turns of this story: “Jeunes Arabes” are topical again today... as (problem) migrants. At the turn of the century they were a sensation from the colonies. One of these western colonial images, however, became a picture for the prophet Mohammed sometime in Iran and was equipped with the right story. An exciting point is also the sovereignty of interpretation (of a state or context) over an image and that in this whole story (but also otherwise often) art plays a central role in the creation and maintenance of state ideologies.

Two further groups of works hang opposite *Jeunes Arabes*: *Herbarium Turicum* and *The Rolex-Series*. *Herbarium Turicum* consists of a group of six nature printed sheets of neophytes from Zurich. These are plants that were intentionally or accidentally introduced into Switzerland. An overview of "alien species and their threat to biodiversity and the Swiss economy" has been published by the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment. "These problem plants are spreading rapidly and displacing native flora. Within the framework of the "Swiss Strategy on Invasive Alien Species" of 18 May 2016, it was defined when and how the individual species are to be combated. The military and xenophobic connotation of the words used to describe the handling of classified plants, such as "invasive" and "alien", is irritating and gives rise to a certain ambiguity. The very term "domestic" is reminiscent of the political instrumentalization of plants in the Third Reich. The question arises as to the adequate choice and usefulness of terms for dealing with neophytes, as well as the sense of combating plants, and whether the repopulation of species in new habitats is not a dynamic process? When is something foreign and when is something native? When does one plant have more right to be here than another? The prints on pharmaceutical paper are fragile and stand in the tradition of plant collectors and herbaria.

The artificial, digitally printed *The Rolex Series* stands in stark contrast to the hand-printed *Herbarium Turicum*, both technically and in terms of content. The Rolex watches worn by well-known people were reconstructed by Utzni on a computer in 3D. The wristwatches are reproduced as fetish objects in colored frames and a ground of the same color. The watches of e.g. Dalai Lama, Che Guevara, Jay-Z and Pablo Picasso stand for safe values. Their wearers may have received the watches as gifts from the Swiss company, or they may be their advertising media. In the context of the exhibition, the representations of Rolex watches undermine the boundary between design and art. The watches symbolize solid craftsmanship and durability.

Utzni is interested in the framework conditions of art production and reception. His pictorial inventions are often preceded by several weeks of research. He is an idea artist who investigates media shifts. Utzni analyzes the boundaries between art and life, politics and science. His exhibitions can be described as a description of his working methods; a closer look reveals connections and complex relationships between the individual groups of works.

Sebastian Utzni born 1981 in Augsburg (DE), lives and works in Zurich and Lucerne (CH).

The opening reception takes place, **Friday, 30 August 2019**, 6 to 9pm. Sebastian Utzni will be present. For further information and images please contact the Lullin + Ferrari, Limmatstrasse 214, CH-8005 Zurich, t. +41 43 205 26 07, info@lullinferrari.com, www.lullinferrari.com
Opening hours: Tuesday to Friday 12–6pm, Saturday 11 to 5pm, and by appointment.