

Dieter Hall & Xénia Lucie Laffely | 22.11.18 – 02.02.19

This exhibition is a meeting between traditional still-life subjects and contemporary figuration that relates to digital culture. With 32 years apart, Dieter Hall works in the medium of oil painting and pastel whilst Xénia Lucie Laffely works primarily with quilt-making and ceramics. The exhibition sidelines Hall's male nudes and portraits together with Laffely's homage to female characters and icons. Another focal point is their exploration of domestic settings and the still-life, both having depicted objects such as beds, bathtubs, cushions, phones and chairs. The poetic and captivating world of the still-life begs a careful and intimate looking of planes of composition, shapes, patterns and colors. At times it requires abandoning scrutinizing ways of seeing, and to be open to subliminal experiences of an object's sensual properties. Visible in the practices of Dieter Hall and Xénia Lucie Laffely is a will to consider gender differently from normalized stereotypes. Hall in his depictions of the sensual nude male and Laffely who is interested in finding new narratives around the idea of the idea of femaleness and craft-making. Quilt-making having been considered a home craft that has been historically associated with the "feminine" and as being a "gracious" discipline.

Dieter Hall (born 1955 in Zurich) is a Swiss painter with a long-held interest in portraiture, domestic scenes and interiors as his primary subjects. Male bodies are offered up for voyeuristic pleasure as we are invited into the private and intimate settings of the bathroom and bedroom. Working mostly with oil on canvas and pastels his interiors also contain everyday objects such as chairs, bathtubs in deserted interiors. The daily ritual of washing is depicted by Hall as both an ordinary act, but also one full of erotic tension. His portrait paintings are made from live sittings and then later worked on from photographs taken during the sessions. Hall has oftentimes painted the black and brown body, and featured in the exhibition are portraits of his friends from his days living in New York City. As artist friend and photographer Allen Frame has nicely expressed, Hall explores "the mystique of an underreported subject, the behaviour of men with their guard down, and their sense of grace wide open." Hall, having been inspired by the pastels of Edgar Degas has similarly found interest in the the motif of a nude entering/exiting the water. These unusual poses despite their physical awkwardness also have a sensuality to them. In other nudes the sitter is facing the viewer with a straight on gaze, posed with unassuming frankness. In some of the still lives we sense bodily presence and intimacy, such as in rumpled bed sheets in their undone state, or the erotic quietude of an empty bathtub. Sometimes rubbing oil paint directly onto the canvas by hand, Hall's color palette is at times bold, whilst other times we witness irregular soft contours and exaggerated foreshortenings with compositions (e.g. body parts) dramatically cropped. Curator Christoph Voegele makes a fitting note about the disproportions: "the over-large hands and feet emphasize precisely those body parts that especially characterize the individual and as a result are capable of awakening the most tender or lustful feelings."

Hall began painting in New York City in the 1980s and lived there for almost three decades. It was there that he became friends with people in the avant-garde scene in the East Village such as artist Bill Rice, photographers Peter Hujar and Allen Frame, and ethnographer Hugh Raffles. Since 2011 Hall is based in Zurich.

Xénia Lucie Laffely's (born 1987 in Morges) visual language has an affinity to post-internet aesthetics with slick Photoshopped gradients as backdrops and trippy environments with surreal appearances of chameleons and iphones. Her quilts—which can serve either as bedspreads or as tapestries—are appealing and yet also somehow disturbing. Their glossiness could hark back to the sublime of capitalistic advertising with its appeal of absolute beauty, of money, power and prettily-skinned women. It is a space inhabited by characters with hybrid identities, porous bodies with snake-like protrusions and claw-like nails, pointing to Laffely's interest in the fine line between hyper femininity and the witch persona. She devotes deep contemplation to their making, merging modern digital techniques with traditional craftsmanship. The creations are printed onto fabric and then enhanced with layerings and embroideries. In the series *Self-help Sleep* Laffely was inspired by women figures, be they fictive or real, and portrays feminist icons such as the artist Judy Chicago.

The blanket for Laffely is a mystical medium: wrapped around the body its proximity allowing for an unusual sensual relationship with the depicted images. The bed is an intimate place where bodies free themselves from tension. The quilts were originally created as magical amulets and/or guardian angels to help friends who had troubles sleeping. For the artist the bed is also a haven for creativity. This goes against the more conventional ideas of productivity whereby people have to leave the house to work.