

Press release
January 2020

Tobias Pils
Adam & Eve

January 25 to March 14, 2020
Opening on Friday, January 24, 10 am to 6 pm
Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present a new solo exhibition with the Viennese artist Tobias Pils. After presentations in Zurich, New York, and Antiparos, this is the gallery's fourth solo exhibition with the artist.

Pils' paintings and graphic works are almost beyond interpretation. His painting process is characterized by planning, which then negates itself throughout its execution. As a result, representation flips into abstraction, figuration turns into composition. Pils' work creates an unease of interpretation and challenges the notion of subjectivity in painting: His method follows intuition and is created in the context of the painter's everyday. Yet, he never fulfills his plan and instead takes different directions while painting. In doing so, he produces manifold forms within one canvas. Nevertheless, his practice is always accompanied by technical precision and pictorial thought. Pils creates work whose attraction lies in the ambivalence of interpretative uncanniness, discontinuity, and technical mastery.

In the exhibition *Adam & Eve*, Pils shows six new paintings of different formats and six ink-on-paper drawings, all of the same size (115 x 83 cm), which accompany the paintings. The works are centered on the motif of a couple under an apple tree. However, the title *Adam & Eve* was chosen after their completion and does not necessarily imply a framing within cultural history. It is rather a way of making this association tenuous; to make space for the uncertainties the artistic process comes with. By naming an obvious interpretation in the title, it becomes less significant.

Pils does not start his pictures with ideas; they evolve during their making — and dissolve at the same time. Through composition and formal realization, preconscious ideas become imagery. The idea of a loving couple embedded in nature is not drawn from the past, but rather from a subjective utopian future, which the painter drags into the present.

Uncertainty, ignorance, and the allusions to existing narratives — for example, that of Adam and Eve — evolve only when viewer and work face each other. Pils interweaves a subjective future made present in the pieces and the past of collective memory.

The imagery of the six paintings, which seems clear at first sight, evolves and dissolves into contradictions: Apples, trees, and couples are depicted in each painting, yet their relations with one another remain ambiguous. The couples, mostly painted in bubble-like shapes, seem to be simultaneously rooted in and isolated from nature. It remains unclear whether the bubbles are connected to the trees or exist separately from them. In one of the paintings, the trees in front of the entwined couple seem to set a stage. Subsequently, it is impossible to estimate the distance between them. In these paintings, one cannot determine the narrative.

The six ink-on-paper drawings each correspond to one of the paintings. They are not preliminary sketches, but drawn after the fact, revisiting the images and reflecting upon them. They can be understood as an exercise — or meditation — the result of which is unclear. The drawings are also not the outcome of a serial practice, but rather a return to the painting, which is not supposed to be repeated. Furthermore, the material — more than a hundred years old paper emanating its own atmosphere — cannot be reproduced, thereby contributing to the uniqueness of the drawings. Nothing the sketches show is predictable, they show the outcome of what occurred during meditation.

Tobias Pils was born in 1971 in Linz, Austria, and lives and works in Vienna, Austria. Recent solo exhibitions in museums include Josef Albers Museum, Bottrop, DE (2018), Kunsthalle Krems, Krems by the Danube, AT (2017), Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (together with Michael Williams) (2017), Chinati Foundation, John Chamberlain Building, Marfa, US (2016), Wiener Secession, Vienna, AT (2013). Recent group exhibitions in major museums include *Le Consortium Collection*, Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2018); *Jay DeFeo – The Ripple Effect*, Aspen Art Museum, Aspen, US (2018); *Spiegelnde Fenster*, 21er Haus, Vienna, AT (2017); *ART UNLIMITED*, ART 47 BASEL, Basel, CH (2016).

Tillmann Severin

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Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Pathos the pathetic*, the gallery's second solo exhibition with the New York-based artist Justin Matherly.

In his works, Matherly often uses Greek or Roman antiquity as a starting point from which he creates his own visual cosmos. Many of his large-scale sculptures are reproductions of more or less common forms of antiquity such as statues, reliefs, or columns that were crucial to ancient cults and culture. Matherly's initial forms are usually carved out of XPS insulation foam and then cast in concrete, gypsum, fiberglass resin, or other contemporary materials. Instead of creating a smooth surface, Matherly leaves traces of the production process, thus evoking a contrast to the flawless perfection that is commonly associated with ancient sculpture. Some works are cast in sections, leaving quadratic cracks to expose how they were made.

In this exhibition, Matherly shows new works that continue his contemporary reflections on antiquity, as well as on modern philosophy. He blurs these references by cutting off parts of the original works he is referring to or estranging them in other ways. The sculptures on view are stripped of their initial references, thus giving an intimate view of the artist's sculptural thoughts.

The large-scale sculpture *Eat yourself fitter* features an enlarged reproduction of the head of Asclepius, the Greek deity of medicine and healing. Instead of placing his head on his body and including the Rod of Asclepius (a snake-entwined staff, the international symbol for medicine), Matherly has placed the god on winding poles, which resemble intestines leading to his mouth, perhaps to nourish him. Encapsulating several core concepts of Matherly's oeuvre, the work brings to mind the mythological snake Ouroboros swallowing its tail, thereby symbolizing eternal recurrence as Nietzsche purported it.

The god of healing's self-sufficiency is certainly a divine arrangement, and yet the sculpture does not seem to have a stable footing and gives an overall impression of sadness rather than divinity. There is no more antique pathos here; the god has become a pathetic character.

In two further works, *Incorporated* and *Virginia's in the house*, Matherly combines antique forms with a schematic depiction of intestines. By literally featuring human insides, he anthropomorphizes the forms. The column — *the* archetype of architecture — and the basin, alluding to Katharsis, a cleansing ritual forming the basis of admission to the Asclepiion, are connected to digestion and thus to the most profane and earthy part of human existence. This macabre humor reminds one of the fundamental idea of humanity's oscillation between divinity and bestiality.

Wall reliefs that render abstract forms are also included in the exhibition, appearing to observe the viewer with their ocular shapes and bare teeth. These strange forms were not created by accident but stem from molds Matherly used for the earlier sculpture *Nietzsche's Rock* (2017). This is a copy of a rock on the shores of Lake Silvaplana in Switzerland, which Nietzsche described as the place where he first thought of the idea of eternal recurrence, i.e. that each and every moment in our life will be repeated eternally. In this vision, all decisions, however small they may be, have a great impact on our lives. Pliable silicone molds of the different sections of rock, without their rigid mother mold, create these flat reliefs. The effect of these objects is to exorcise Nietzsche's heavy and potentially depressing idea by flattening the rock, thereby bringing it down to earth. Once again, pathos becomes pathetic in its everyday meaning — however, the pathetic does not simply turn into pitiful existence but rather a carnivalesque satire of the human attempt at greatness. To put it in Nietzsche's words: *Human, All Too Human*.

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Justin Matherly was born 1972 in West Islip, New York, and lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. His first group exhibition with Galerie Eva Presenhuber took place in 2014, and his first solo show in 2016. His work is represented in major museums and private collections worldwide, including the Helga de Alvear Foundation Cáceres, Spain, and the Nasher Museum of Art, North Carolina, US. Recent solo exhibitions include Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, US (2017); Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, US (2015); Galerie König, Berlin, DE (2015); Johann König, Berlin, DE (2014). Recent group shows include *Lustwarande '19 – Delirious*, Park De Oude Warande, Tilburg, NL (2019); *Group Exhibition*, Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, US (2019); *Adam McEwen Selects: Exhibition and Sale to Benefit the Foundation for Contemporary Arts*, Gladstone Gallery, New York, US (2018); *It Came In Waves*, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Pantin, Paris, FR (2018); *Pedro Cabrita Reis, Nan Goldin, Justin Matherly, Kewenig*, Berlin, DE (2018); *Münster: Skulptur Projekte 2017*, Münster, DE (2017).

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