

# PHILIPP HAVERKAMPF GALERIE

**Alex Ruthner**

FIREWORKS

14.09. - 26.10.2019

*A text by Alex Ruthner:*

## 1. Title

The title *FIREWORKS* refers to the purifying power of fire and, like the show's opening date, Friday the 13th of September, to a new beginning.

## 2. The works

The exhibition consists of two groups of images. One is a series of oversized flower bouquets and the other is a series of group portraits that refer in detail to current social developments and discourse. The paintings are complemented by new objects which could be described as podiums, some of which can be used as seating and that complete the presentation.

## 3. The flower bouquets

Nature, here represented as the still-life of flower bouquets, symbolizes the cycle of metamorphosis, the blossoming of beauty and its transience.

The flowers are disheveled, wildly arranged, and forced into containers not intended for these purposes. Here, those delicate botanical subjects can be redefined, considered and judged.

For me, the weird and uncanny is not merely represented by the showing or withholding of references to the classic horror genre in constructed circumstances. Emotional perceptions of darkness, fog, howling wind or candlelight are part of the canon of horror as much as fantastical beings like monsters, zombies or similar beasts are. However, since such creations are "just stories", the superficial threats and intimidation factors quickly lose their effect. In contrast to a cheap haunted house, a good horror thriller can be shocking, but ends two hours later. The true terror here lies in the normality of everyday life, its rituals and its inhabitants, who must face the immutable facts of reality. This reveals itself without any prospect of escape. Again, I do not mean ordinary ugliness or boundless violence, even if deceitful betrayal or mindless hate, undoubtedly are instrumental in the realization of the madness of normalcy. The root of all evil is the daily routine that prevents change and development with all its might.

At the same time, and by that I mean at the same moment, there are flashes of beauty in the grandeur of nature - simplicity, the plant, the stroke, a curve, a light, a combination, the sound of wind, a voice. Whole worlds brighten at the sight of such beautiful births, and the truth shines far above the fictional and the stolen.

Without knowing where these auratic phenomena come from, or why they look the way they do or are the way they are, we find them beautiful. Recognizing and establishing this permanent state of rotation, this rhythm of gasping for air and diving back in, the subtle switching on and off of the light, is as difficult as identifying the side of a coin while its spinning.

A leaf, blown through the city by the wind spins less frequently than the whims of nature itself.

## 4. The group of groups

A number of everyday historical situations create balance among the bouquets and play around with the violence of the botanical still lifes. Derived from different sources (pictures, books, photography, the internet, games) its subjects include a family residing in an urban park, a Viennese legend, entangled interwoven figures, and a self-portrait with a military pose.

### 4.1. The five senses

Whenever I go for a walk in the summer, I notice all the happy families in the meadows - having barbecues, playing, resting or sunbathing. These images are further completed by perceiving the urban environment in which they

# PHILIPP HAVERKAMPF GALERIE

exist - the streets, the buildings, the traffic, the smoke of the campfires. A depressing sort of idyll and timelessness surrounds the meadows, the parks and areas of recreation.

## 4.2. You are not like that, you are like us

A band, alone, backstage. Instruments that are currently in repose. I often choose personal items, furniture or studio rooms as a template to consciously make use of the objects I find most intuitive. The mariachi band portrayed here is discussing, writing, and singing the heroic songs of the criminal and subversive elements of society. These hymns composed by mariachi bands can also be commissioned.

## 4.3. Kom / Com

Come on, run away! a child's game similar to "catch" - could also be the title of this painting. The setting is Conrad, a German electronics store. It depicts twins using a desktop computer with a mouse and keyboard, surrounded by empty shelves, with nothing in their hands. The soldier-like camouflage outfits say nothing specific about an affiliation to a regime, but suggest some form of organization. Electronically controlled attacks on enemies of the state or unpleasant dissidents planned and carried out in the secluded world of the World Wide Web (the "Net") are used by the planetary rulers to keep the population and its subjects in check and to intimidate them. Like in all conspiracy theories, shady characters are at fault, instilling fear in their enemies.

Komm (English: com) is the first syllable of the word communication, but also of community. The connective - an unspecified superior consciousness or system of perception - dominates this warlike consumerist scene.

I decked the figures out with Dior earrings to give them something festive, maybe something friendly.

## 4.4. City without a name

The short stories of H.P. Lovecraft are an important literary foundation for my work. His exaggerated horror visions and his attraction to black magic are almost humorous to me - it's about reading situations and their interpretations at once. So I push the limits of change through different elements and mental states - from text to image, from digital to real, and vice versa. Each work has several interpretations.

## 4.5. Far superior

Once upon waking, I remembered the old story of dear Augustin. At a time when the plague was raging, the gravediggers in Vienna were collecting the bodies of victims scattered everywhere in the streets. Augustine, listless and drunk, was thought to be dead. He was taken to a hearse and dumped in a mass grave outside Vienna. The tomb was still only half full. When Augustine awoke, he found himself in the midst of a pile of the dead. Still elated to be alive, he began to sing and did not let the horror of this moment spoil the mood.

The sky symbolizing the world and the pit representing the room create the boundaries of space within the image. Dream-like figures loosely float around the Prince Iron Heart-esque character who poses shyly at the center.

## 4.6. Prebseunty

"This is the locker of private Ruthner!" I learned how to present my position during my military service. The strangeness of military subservience is enhanced by the loss of your own personality. One always speaks of himself in the third person. Saying "please" and "thank you" is strictly forbidden.

## 5. The podiums, a catwalk, fireworks

### 5.1

Three podiums are placed in the middle of the room: two simple podiums reminiscent of piers or catwalks or stage elements serve as a seat on which the visitor can sit down to look at the paintings.

### 5.2

A podium of identical design and height holds a sculpture reminiscent of an ancient pyre. This sculpture is additionally lit at close range by five floor lamps. One possible title of this sculpture would be "Quezalcoatl," an ascetic deity represented by a hybrid creature - a feathered serpent.

## PHILIPP HAVERKAMPF GALERIE

Archaic rituals and long lost cultures inspired the creation of this small altar. The various items and artifacts offered here evoke the Indian ritual of burning the dead, or ancient Egyptian burial practices, where the individual forms were represented as animals, everyday objects and human body parts.

I applied a Mesoamerican look to these prefabricated forms with mosaic patterns of glass and ceramic. Other references include ancient Pompeian mosaics and iron jewelry. The mostly square shape of the mosaic stone means several things to me - in addition to the image in all its current manifestations (painting, TV, Instagram, jpeg etc), it creates the impression of splitting the mind or the collective consciousness into countless pieces. Another title proposal would be: Sentinel.

Philipp Haverkampf is very pleased to host Alex Ruthner's second solo exhibition in the gallery. Alex Ruthner was born 1982 in Vienna and lives and works in Vienna.

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Opening Hours: Wednesday - Friday 11am - 6pm, Saturday 11am - 4pm and by appointment