

Press release
January 2020

Justin Matherly
Pathos the pathetic

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 *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*.

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

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).

Tillmann Severin

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