

Press release
April 2021

Jean-Marie Appriou
Fire on the Sea

April 30 to June 13, 2021
Opening on Friday, April 30, 11 am to 6 pm
Waldmannstrasse, Waldmannstr. 6, CH-8001 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Fire on the Sea*, the gallery's second solo exhibition with the French artist Jean-Marie Appriou. *Fire on the Sea* features ten new bronze and aluminum sculptures.

For this exhibition, the artist has arranged his sculptures into three rooms that each draw on an inspirational source unique to the group of works contained: freshwater, the ocean, and caves. Appriou continues to explore these inspirational realms in his art, all of which have one thing in common: the evocation of spaces he describes as "matrix-like." These three worlds are, in fact, just that, each with a tendency to invoke stories, shapes, and figures. Appriou's work conjures up an entire Pantheon, ranging from Greek mythology (Hades, Atlas, the Cyclops, a naiad) to Shakespearian prose (Ophelia), as well as a recollection of aesthetic experiences that have played a decisive role in his art: English Pre-Raphaelite painting, William Blake, Hieronymus Bosch, Odilon Redon... and ancient sculpture, from which he borrows the strategy of adding eyes to the sculpted bodies of his characters.

Produced in collaboration with a glassmaker, the eyes are made of solid glass containing flecks of gold or colored glitter, with the addition of a suspended black ball ("like a galaxy suspended in the universe," to use Appriou's words). These balls form the pupil or, in some cases, a double pupil—clearly not an attempt at realism but located at the very heart of the universe the artist has built, which makes the gaze a central theme of this group of sculptures. The philosopher Paul Virilio suggested that we may visit museums as much to see the works of art as to be seen by them: Appriou's sculptures quite literally gaze at us with their large, wide-open eyes, influenced by 1990s horror films and David Bowie's differently colored eyes (each eye being unique in its manufacture, the figures with two—or three—have different eyes).

The "fire on the sea" that lends its name to the exhibition triggers a mental image of an event superimposing two elements (water and fire) and invites us to imagine what this proximity does to both. The majority of the sculptures displayed in the exhibition's first two rooms (the first giving the show its name, *Fire on the Sea*, followed by *The Murmur*, *Ophelia*, *Naiad*) were designed to allow visitors to see both the immersed and emerged parts of the figures: the sea becomes a plinth, symbolizing the separation of two worlds. The gaze perceives both above and below the water, where a distorted reality is expressed and becomes a world of its own, inspired here by Chinese dragons and sea serpents. The shapes and stories within these sculptures engage in dialogue with each other.

Fire on the Sea also refers to the lighthouse that guides seafarers (and the viewer?). It stops them from drifting off course and gives out a beam of light much like the manifestation of the gaze from a single eye (like the Cyclops), embracing the world with a 360° view: Appriou's *Lighthouse Keeper* has two noses and three eyes as if his face could actually be seen in the round. The diving mask that occupies the left part of the *Fire on the Sea* sculpture also gives it the appearance of a lighthouse. The artist speaks of characters "enhanced" by their narrative attributes: a diving mask or a crown of seaweed, the flowers around Ophelia's face, all give the sculptures opportunities to reach new embodiments.

The idea of duality runs throughout the exhibition: mismatched eyes, superimposed worlds, and a passage from one world to another—Appriou drew inspiration for his *Lighthouse Keeper* from figures such as Janus, the Roman God of passages, gates, and transitions, usually portrayed with two faces. The artist's previous exhibition at Galerie Eva Presenhuber, *November* (2018), took its narrative device from the passage from one season to the next (autumn, the end of the harvest, the cooling of the soil) and from the earth. *Fire on the Sea* transposes this narrative into the water. Each sculpture is a powerful storyteller that invites the imagination to embrace freedom and fantasy. As in the good old days of the avant-garde, they also represent alternative formal solutions: the female figures in the water undoubtedly recall Cézanne's *Bathers* or *Four Sisters in the Bath* by Thomas Schütte, and the *Atlas*, rightly missing its head, that of Michelangelo.

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

Because he understands how to implement a style, the figures in *Fire on the Sea* already seem familiar and are in keeping with the language Appriou uses to speak to us. There is no choice but to surrender to their new destination, to their dreamlike power, to their new epic, to the heroic stories they inspire. Every sculpture in the exhibition is anthropomorphic, with one exception, *Ressac*, which is also the only one titled in French. Sculpted in bronze, it represents a wave (a moment that exists and then no longer exists) and is a clear reference to Chinese scholar's rocks of the 5th to 7th centuries. Placed on pedestals, these small fragments of rock moved scholars—in their cramped apartments—to reflect on the immensity of nature. In short, they were instruments for altering dimension and gaining access to the immeasurable. An ambition in tune with that of *Fire on the Sea*.

Jean-Marie Appriou was born in 1986 in Brest, FR, and lives and works in Paris, FR. Appriou graduated from École régionale des beaux-arts de Rennes, FR, in 2010. Recent institutional solo exhibitions include *The Horses*, organized by Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, New York, NY, US (2019–2020); *Seabed*, Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2019–2020); and *Open Space #1*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR (2018). Appriou participated in *Là où les eaux se mêlent*, Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, FR (2019) with a major installation titled *Roncier*. Selected institutional group exhibitions include *Childhood: Another banana for the dream-fish*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2018); *Neuer Norden Zürich*, KiöR Kunst im öffentlichen Raum, Zurich, CH (2018); *Deux sens du décoratif*, Centre d'art Contemporain, Brest, FR (2018); *Voyage d'Hiver*, Château de Versailles, Versailles, FR (2017); *Robots. Work. Our Future*, Vienna Biennale, Vienna, AT (2017); *MEDUSA*, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, FR (2017); *L'Usage des Formes*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2015); and *La solitude*, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, NO (2014).

Eric Troncy

For further information, please contact Andreas Grimm (a.grimm@presenhuber.com) or Jill McLennon (j.mclennon@presenhuber.com).

For press images and information, please contact Naomi Chassé (n.chasse@presenhuber.com).