

# GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

WALTER SWENNEN

16 MAY – 26 JUL 2024

Opening: Thursday, May 16, 2024, 6 p.m.  
Vienna 1, Domgasse 6

Swennen's heterogeneous oeuvre aims at the boundaries of what can be named by way of multifaceted codifications, iconographic references, and symbolically charged elements, thereby creating enigmatic pictures that translate all attempts to be deciphered into a renewed sense of mystery.

In his third solo exhibition at Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Walter Swennen is presenting a group of earlier and recent works on paper along with a new painting on canvas.

What do his pictures refer to? That the artist suggests references ranging from philosophy to comics does not make it any easier for beholders to answer this question. His work is grounded in the central conviction that the seemingly decipherable content is never identical with the picture itself. Lacan captures this in his reflection that the real is unimaginable and cannot be expressed. So, what do Swennen's paintings represent? The *prima causa* – in other words, the primary meaning – of his paintings is painting itself.

Hiding behind the veil of objectivity, Swennen leads us through a sea of meanings and levels in which we can only surmise the destination. Swennen's pictorial spaces explore the relationships between symbols or signs and the painterly surface in an associative and, most of all, humorous way, making it possible to read these as reference points and leitmotifs, while words and motifs hint at other meanings.

How Swennen treats his subjects reminds us of a kind of visual poetry that harkens back to his earlier career as a poet. His subjects, in turn, evolve out of a large repertoire that includes his own art. The recurring motifs of containers, means of transportation, outlines, clowns, and ghosts are also important. The latter symbolize an understanding of the picture based on free-floating signifiers that remain out of reach for the beholders.

Many of Swennen's works consist of enlarged reconstructions of found drawings or ones that he has made himself. He describes the figurative elements in his pictures as *images* that are reminiscent of familiar situations in which something unfathomable has happened, as subjects change their form in the process of drawing.

Although the absence of a correctly rendered perspective and the rejection of depth can almost create the impression of "flat paintings", his use of a tonal contrast evokes the appearance of depth. The pictorial space is structured by painting over parts of the picture in a process of overlaying that begins to dissolve the painting's content. The question thus remains: Must the meaning behind each individual painting be solved?

**WALTER SWENNEN** was born 1946 in Brussels, Belgium. He lives and works in Brussels.

Selected solo exhibitions: *Walter Swennen. Das Phantom der Malerei / The Phantom of Painting*, Kunst Museum Winterthur (2022) in collaboration with Kunstmuseum Den Haag, The Hague (2021–2022) and Kunstmuseum Bonn (2021); La Triennale di Milano, Milan (2018); *Ein perfektes Alibi*; Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2015); *So Far So Good*, WIELS, Brussels (2013–2014); *Continuer*, Culturgest, Lisbon (2013); *Garibaldi Slept Here*, Kunstverein Freiburg (2011). His works are currently on view in the group exhibition "LACAN, THE EXHIBITION. When art meets psychoanalysis" at the Centre Pompidou-Metz.

Selected collections: Belgacom art collection, Brussels; CNAP Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris; M HKA Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerp; Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels; SMAK Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent; FRAC Auvergne; FRAC Bretagne; FRAC Languedoc-Roussillon, and many other international private collections.