

Esther Schipper

Olaf Hajek

The Dandy's Garden

September 7 – October 5, 2024



Olaf Hajek, *Verführung*, 2024, acrylic, modeling paste and paper collage on canvas, 160 x 120 cm. Photo © CHROMA

Esther Schipper is delighted to announce **The Dandy's Garden**, a solo exhibition by illustrator, artist and author Olaf Hajek. This is Hajek's first exhibition with the gallery. On view will be all new paintings and a selection of drawings

Olaf Hajek is known for his imaginative and poetic illustrations which draw on a colorful pictorial world full of fantastic flora and fauna, objects and figures that engages with themes of mythology, spirituality, folklore, archaic symbolism and pop culture. Hajek's graphic work has been featured in the New York Times, The New Yorker, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Audubon, Stern, FAZ Magazin, and Cicero, among others.

At Esther Schipper Paris, Olaf Hajek presents a group of new paintings conceived as a story about contemporary life symbolized by the figure of the Dandy. The paintings frame the artifice and elegance, superficiality and hedonism associated with the figure—especially in 19th century commentaries on the social phenomenon in Britain and in France—within Hajek's distinct iconography: the Dandy becomes associated with a flower, its brilliant colors and extravagant forms expressions of exuberance and the search for pleasure. At the same time, there is neither only one Dandy nor a clearly gendered one but each painting features multiple figures that can be considered representations of different aspects of the character. We follow his figures in different scenarios, entering for example a garden full of seduction that, with lush imagery and bright colors, promises an edenic fecundity. The protagonist are depicted engaged in leisurely communal activities, while overflowing fountains allude to water as life-sustaining mythical force.

Yet, while the Dandy is an object of adoration for his elegance and style, to Hajek it is also an ambivalent figure that embodies the fleetingness of beauty and the danger of focusing exclusively on one's momentary enjoyment. From this perspective, the Dandy's fabled eccentricity and abandon to his own desires become symbols of the hazards of a life lived "dancing on the volcano" as Hajek puts it. Other paintings then begin to depict the toll the life takes on the Dandy: a darker color palette and partially dissolving outlines signal a

change in mood, as the hedonistic world of the Dandy becomes fragmented, more contained and less playful. Paintings with multiple figures in compact compositions—perhaps representing different paths taken or not taken and a subsequent loss of freedom—evoke the work of memory and have a dream-like quality.

Executed either on wooden panels or canvas, the paintings include collage elements and passages of built-up impasto. The weathered materiality of Hajek's works speaks to the subject matter the artist addresses with his iconography of historical and mythological motifs, forging his own poignant pictorial world.

For the exhibition in Paris **The Dandy's Garden** Hajek draws not only on his established formal vocabulary but adapts his imagery to the Parisian context. Featuring motifs of baldaquins and tents, the paintings include references to the tradition of French graphic illustration but also playfully alludes to the fashion world, close by represented by the Place Vendôme with its Haute Couture studios and boutiques.

Olaf Hajek was born in 1965 in Rendsburg, he lives and works in Berlin and Palma de Mallorca. After finishing his degree in graphic design at the University of Applied Sciences in Düsseldorf, Hajek moved to Amsterdam and began to work as a freelance artist. Quickly gaining acclaim in the world of graphics and advertising, Hajek created international campaigns for Bombay Sapphire, Coca Cola, KaDeWe, Macy's, Montblanc, L'Oréal, Ritz Carlton, Swatch, Vodafone, Weleda, Zacapa, United Airlines and Accessorize, among others. Most recent brand collaborations have included campaigns for Victor and Rolf, Diptyque, Meissen and Printemps, Paris.

Hajek has published numerous illustrated books, most recently **Olaf Hajek's Fantastic Fruits**, with Annette Roeder (2022); **Veggie Power**, with Annette Roeder (2021); **Flower Power: The Magic of Nature's Healers**, with Cristine Paxmann (2020), **French Baker: Authentic Recipes for Traditional Breads, Desserts, and Dinners**, by Sébastien Boudet, Olaf Hajek, et al. (2013), all with the Prestel Verlag.

And books featuring his artworks: **Olaf Hajek**, Ludvigrage (2022), **Olaf Hajek**, Distanz Verlag (2017); **Black Antoinette: The Work of Olaf Hajek**, Gestalten (2012), **Olaf Hajek: Flowerhead**, Gestalten (2010).

Olaf Hajek's artworks have been exhibited in solo exhibitions in Hamburg, Munich, Berlin, Atlanta, Shanghai, Palma de Mallorca, Buenos Aires and Cape Town.

For press inquiries please contact David Ulrichs. Tel: +49 (0) 176 50 33 01 35 or david@davidulrichs.com