

**GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN
ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER**

SPENCER LEWIS

5 SEP – 19 OCT 2024

AM SEE [BY THE LAKE]

Opening: Thursday, September 5, 2024, 7 p.m.

Introduction: Florian Steininger, Director Kunsthalle Krems, 7.30 p.m.

'The works are rough, sketchy and there were no limits,' says American artist Spencer Lewis talking about his latest works, which are characterised by a tremendous sense of experimentation and a powerful gestural interpretation. These works were produced during a stay of several weeks as part of the SoArt artists-in-residence at Lake Millstatt in the Austrian federal province of Carinthia in summer 2024; they debut at Lewis's first extensive solo exhibition at the Gallery in *AM SEE*.

Lewis's painterly exploration expresses itself in the interplay of color, of abstraction and figuration, of various media and formats. Large works on watercolor paper are the focal point of this body of work, literally absorbing the lake itself. Indeed, the roll of paper was first dipped into the lake water and then smoothed out in anticipation of the artist's application of vibrant lines, patches of color and trickling traces of paint overlaid to form an expressive structure of interwoven layers. The delight Lewis takes in experimentation is immediately apparent in his works: when, for example, colors such as bright pink contrast with lush green, when lines end abruptly only to re-emerge elsewhere, or when rivulets of paint resonate with the physical gestures that produced them. These individual elements might appear random, but instead they combine to create dynamic images that convey a vivid presence and vibrancy.

Lewis adopts a similar interplay of divergent colors and shapes in his oil and acrylic paintings. There is even a hint of Dadaism blended into these works, with the inclusion of a word here and there. *WAS WO?* or *WO WAS I*, German words that Lewis picked up while in residence that also mean something for him in English; in ways not dissimilar to a comic strip, they appear to comment on the events unfolding in the paintings.

The two large-format acrylic paintings on jute can also be read as a commentary on their origins. Within the exhibition space, they are free-floating: attached to the ceiling merely by a wooden slat and a length of cord. Like the sails of a boat the jute flutters in the wind and, with it, the expressive impasto painting. The lake as cipher is also present in Lewis's delicate watercolors. The silhouette of a boat defines the pictorial space—sailboats under clear skies or sailing towards the sunset. Sketches of postcard idylls and memories of summer. *Am See*.

SPENCER LEWIS, born 1979 in Hartford, Connecticut, lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the Rhode Island School of Design and the University of California, Los Angeles.

His paintings, sculptures, and installations have been shown across the globe, including the Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Manila (2023); K11 Musea, Hong Kong (2023); MASSIMODECARLO, Milan (2023, solo); Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington, D.C. (2022); Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, LOGIN, Vienna (2022, solo); Josh Lilley, London (2022, solo); Vito Schnabel Gallery, New York (2022, solo); the Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas (2022); Harper's, New York (2022, solo); The Mass, Tokyo (2021); Sorry We're Closed, Brussels (2021, solo); and Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp (2019).

Selected collections include National Museum of African American History and Culture at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville; Green Family Art Foundation, Dallas; Marciano Foundation, Los Angeles; Jorge M. and Darlene Pérez Collection, Miami; and Museu Inimá de Paula, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.