

## Exhibition

## FLAG

**Group Show featuring Frank Ahlgrimm, Nú Barreto, Tim Berresheim, Marc Brickman, Anne-Lise Coste, Sinje Dillenkofer, Magnus Gjoen, huber.huber, Samson Kambalu, Robert Longo, Josephine Meckseper, Matt Mullican, Julio Rondo, Slavs and Tatars, Fredrik Værsløv**

22. November 2024 – 24. January 2025

## Opening

Friday, 22. November 2024, 6 – 9 p.m.

## Opening Hours

Tuesday – Friday: 1 – 6 p.m. and by appointment.  
The gallery is closed from 21.12.2024 until 07.01.2025.

Picture a modern battlefield ravaged by military vehicles, littered with shrapnel, and abandoned by the last surviving men. Above it a lonely flag flutters in an open sky – an ambivalent sign of peace and destruction. Although it is unknown how and when it came about, a flag is the most established signalling device of humankind. It can be a promise of goodwill or an omen of ruin. Now imagine all the flags that shimmered over thousands of years... Some are now torn to pieces, others yet to be woven. Their colours blend creating an inexhaustible palette enriched by blood, sweat and tears. Not too far from today's military warfare, the group show **FLAG** at Galerie Elisabeth & Reinhard Hauff takes up the flag as its central motif. Different in their patterns and delivery the flags exhibited tell stories of consuming powers, suggestive politics, and ironic encounters.

In the light sculpture *Roundel Nullis Terminus*, 2024, **Marc Brickman** – the world famous light designer of two Olympic games and concert stages for top musicians like Pink Floyd – "envisions light flowing in continuous circularity – a borderless landscape territory that defies ownership and asks the viewer to imagine a boundless society. An Anti-Flag". But it is Marc Brickman's video work *May 1, 2015 (excerpt)* – the short version of his hybrid lighting art installation for the Whitney Museum and the Empire State Building with one of the perhaps most iconic American flag pieces in art history, Jasper John's *Three Flags*, 1958, inserted as a quasi ready-made – which welcomes visitors when entering the exhibition. The contrast between the monumental building, the seat of American power, and the fragility of the flag light fabric is a source of energy. The light painted Empire State Building screams of nationality, patriotism, and potential chauvinism. It is one truly American landmark to behold in the context of the rest of the exhibition. The Berlin based artist duo **Slavs and Tatars'** work *Bicephalic*, 2018, is a flag that exhibits a golden double-headed Russian eagle on a background of the bi-sexual tricolour pattern. The combative stance of the Russian government against its LGBTQI+ community feeds the polemics of the artwork. On the one hand, Russia is one of the most predatory contemporary countries with an eagle that has an insatiable appetite as its symbol. On the other hand, as Slavs and Tatars state, "*Bicephalic* layers Russia's particular position as Europe and Asia, self and other onto the bi-sexual flag, arguing for a geopolitical identity through non binary sexuality." The political undertones are also heard in **Matt Mullican's** iconic *Sign Flag 36" by 72"*, 1980. It is hard to miss the visual similarities with the flag of Nazi Germany. However, instead of a black swastika, there is a mysterious black symbol that Mullican created and repeatedly depicts in his oeuvre. In Mullican's practice, every colour has a specific symbolic value. In one of his systems, white and black stand for language and red for the subjective. Although the exact semiotics of Mullican's work are hard to read, the work creates favourable tensions with other works presented in the show. In the Zurich artist duo **huber.huber's** work *Experiment (Versuch)*, 2017, a black flag is partially submerged in bleach turning its lower part white. There are multiple metaphoric meanings of a black flag. In the West, the black flags are connected to mourning and death. One might see a black flag flying atop a pirate ship. The black colour of the flag can also be associated with skin colour. Bleaching it intrinsically suggests that the flag is somehow contaminated or is a contaminant and is therefore being purged by whitewashing. As Patrizia Keller suggests it represents "an attempt to defeat evil itself." It can further be understood as an experiment of generations of white supremacists to eradicate the black race. However, the bleach dosage must be just right to turn black into white. It is a tight balancing act in which the negative turns positive and vice versa. **huber.huber's** work is not cynical but rather ironic, seeing it also as an image of how we re-write history. The acclaimed Malawi born, **Samson Kambalu** – Oxford Professor of Fine Arts and creator of the famous Trafalgar Square Fourth Plinth sculpture *Antelope* – has been making series of imaginary flag compositions in vibrant colours and bold patterns for some years. He draws on colourful images of childhood candy wraps and African fabrics, interspersing mischievous non-flag symbols like *Bat Down Nation Green*, 2022 – and hanging the flags in non-flag hanging ways, signalling thereby some disdain towards traditional colonial pretense of ownership. In a group of four works by **Nú Barreto** (born in Guinea-Bissau, working in Paris) we see stars of what looks like the American flag at first glance leave their designated places. The star clusters cover the recognizable striped pattern, however, the colours of white and red stripes have been changed to yellow and red. The title of the work reads *All Roads Lead to Africa*, 2022. Perhaps it is an attempt by the artist to comment on the intertwined and complicated history of the two continents. The stars that are supposed to represent the American states wander in different directions hinting at displacement and potential exile, something the African people had to suffer in the foreign land. The flag canvases of Norwegian artist **Fredrik Værsløv** are over longer periods exposed to harsh weather conditions so that they become fortified by the elements and take on the traces of use and a life lived. Værsløv partly took inspiration for this process of painting from his compatriot Edvard Munch. This very personal technique gives the flag compositions *Trinidad and Tobago* and *Uzbekistan* – two works from Værsløv's 2020 *World Paintings* series – a fascinating surface density, a materiality. They confront us with questions such as: what is nationhood, a national feeling, national belonging, nationalist fervor, national borders, territorial belonging? In Værsløv's opinion "of course a flag can also be "just" a painting". We do see a smudgy *White Olympic Flag* in **Frank Ahlgrimm's** painting related to the 1972 Munich Olympic Games in which murderous deeds were committed as part of the Munich massacre. The white flag is a tabula rasa – one that can stand for many things depending on the context – it can be a backdrop for peace as well as violence, as in **Magnus Gjoen's** *Wave Your Flag High, We Shall Stand Together*, 2024. With the current turmoil in the world, lifting a white flag and signaling for peace is a much-needed measure. Black is the Darkest Colour. Black is a leitmotif colour of **FLAG**. Look at **Robert Longo's** *Study for Black Flag #5*, from 1989. We see black shine brightly in the aforementioned works as well as in flags by artists, like **Tim Berresheim**, *AAWNK Scholle gehisst – Flagge*, 2020, **Sinje Dillenkofer**, *The Danish Flag 1*, 2019, **Josephine Meckseper**, *German Flag No. 2*, 2001 and **Anne-Lise Coste**, *France Go Home*, 2009. One might say that it portrays the show in dark strokes. One might even say it is timely as we live in dark times. When all is said, what remains is a group of exceptionally strong works by world-class artists. And as pointed out in **Julio Rondo's** beautiful 2024 composition: *FLAG is a Four Letter Word!*  
Text: Paulius Andriuškevičius and Elisabeth Hauff

This show could not have come about had it not been for the generous and friendly collaboration of all the artists involved and the galleries representing them. We would like to express a heartfelt thanks to Andersen's Contemporary, Copenhagen, Galerie Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin, Galerie Mehdi Chouakri, Berlin and Galerie Nathalie Obadia Paris/Brussels.

We cordially invite you to our opening on **Friday, November 22, 2024, from 6 to 9 p.m.**