

# HENNING STRASSBURGER KÖPFE

KÖNIG GALERIE | NAVE

17 JANUARY – 23 FEBRUARY 2025

KÖNIG GALERIE is pleased to present KÖPFE (en: heads), the first solo exhibition for the gallery by Henning Strassburger, located in the Nave of St. Agnes. The exhibition includes new paintings and, for the first time, sculptures that powerfully embody Strassburger's dynamic visual language. With bold colors and gestural compositions, the artist explores the multi-layered intersections of identity, media, and social narratives. His works offer lively commentary on today's fluid existence.

A delight in the image is perhaps the most prominent feature of these new works: a playful exhilaration that turns away from pure abstraction and toward the flesh of painting, its figures, colors, and stories. Strassburger was initially praised as an abstract painter, but in recent years, his relationship to abstraction has become increasingly critical. As a result, Strassburger's paintings engage with figuration, with specific formal allusions to German painters. He has a particular affinity for a genre popularized by Georg Baselitz, which the older painter calls "Heldenbilder" (hero paintings) – a cycle of works from the 1960s – which Strassburger refers to as the "Happy" series. With his "Happy" paintings, Strassburger reinvents himself as a figurative painter in the best German tradition and says "I" in an emphatic sense.

Alphakenny, the artist's doppelgänger, appears in many of these works, a moniker that is designed to introduce a biographical anecdote in an ironic manner. When Strassburger ordered a coffee in a New York Starbucks, he – like everyone else – had to say his first name so that it could be written on his cup. However, the phonetic challenge of "Henning" proved too difficult for the Americans, and the employee wrote "Kenny" on the cup instead, which of course led to confusion on Strassburger's part. "One Americano for Kenny! Kenny! Kenny!" Strassburger didn't feel addressed, but then quickly realized: "Kenny, that's me!" The extension to Alphakenny refers to the schoolyard-famous Alphakevin, a mocking name for the biggest loser in the class, or "a modern-day anti-hero", according to Strassburger.

Strassburger accepts that there can no longer be any heroes in the modern age, because a hero is someone like Aeneas, who founded the Roman Empire; or someone like Prometheus, who brought fire to mankind (against the will of the gods); or Odysseus, who carved out the eye of the Cyclops Polyphemus. The hero is someone who says "I" in an emphatic sense. He creates a new reality by violating an existing law in order to establish a new one. Heroes can only be defeated by other heroes or by the gods, but not by just anyone. With bourgeois society, however, which distributes sovereignty among many and binds it to a dense network of business relationships, the possibility of saying "I" in the emphatic sense is increasingly restricted. So, whoever plays the hero today is no longer condemned to an odyssey and is no longer shackled on the Caucasus by the gods. They simply die, or the police take them away.

Nevertheless, we are still left with two smaller forms of heroism in the classical sense: saying "I" and making art. Both are structurally related to heroism – at least if we understand it philosophically rather than in purely practical terms. For heroism is a special form of negation. The hero does what they want. In doing so, they sometimes break the law. But their actions create a new order – just like a revolutionary who destroys an existing state only to found a new one. The hero transforms their arbitrariness into a law and thereby bestows their actions with exemplary significance. What the hero enacts is law, it is very similar with works of art. They establish a reality and grant themselves a form of law.

But with the performative act of establishing the law, the hero also demonstrates what it means to be a human being and to say "I". The hero is the human being par excellence. For just as establishing the law is a negation that produces a right by doing wrong, saying "I" is also a negation in which I distinguish myself from myself and relate to myself. I divide myself and then form a new unity with myself. Strassburger's Starbucks scene demonstrates this performative act once again. "Kenny, that's me!"

## KÖNIG GALERIE

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### OPENING HOURS

Tuesday – Sunday  
11 am – 6 pm  
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