

SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

Robert Elfgén

I wish my pictures

15/11/2014 - 17/01/2015

Mimesis, the interpretive reproduction of nature, was long considered to be the most important duty of art. Theorists of all epochs, referring back to Aristotle, called upon artists to feel and understand the chaos and order of the natural world in such a way that meaning suddenly became visible there where none could be recognized before. Robert Elfgén's artistic work also focuses in an unusually direct manner on this task which, with the advent of modernism, was pushed to the side and neglected. In recent years, Elfgén has created a unique oeuvre in which he applies complex artisanal techniques to found pieces from nature and from his everyday life, and assembles them into an atmospherically charged, intensely personal form of bricolage. The realities of art and life come together in this position. Art becomes nature, nature becomes art.

In *I wish my pictures*, Elfgén's new exhibition at Sprüth Magers in Berlin, two thematic strands emerge into the foreground which have been latently present in his oeuvre for a long time: the importance of landscape for our being-in-the-world, and the processes with which we perceive or do not perceive this world. A large assemblage sculpture, illuminated by a streetlamp protruding from the wall, is the first sight when entering the room. The exhibition reveals itself under the watchful eye of a circular mirror, into which intarsia has been inserted resembling a pupil. Landscape paintings and assemblages, the latter standing on the ground, guide through the two-parted exhibition space.

The heterogeneous materials of the assemblages convey the impression of having been gathered during a walk and rearranged after returning home. Plywood shapes symbolizing a sailboat and a seagull, glass mirrors laid open from behind, instructions for building a confessional applied to a wooden panel, slightly damaged traffic signs carrying surreal motifs, neckties functioning as colorful accentuation, in their resemblance to elongated, vertical brushstrokes, as well as pictures of black-painted leaves of pressed ferns and motifs found in the Internet, for instance a bus or a woman wearing sunglasses, combine to sculptural collages. The individual elements not only mark certain preferences and biographical aspects of the artist. They are always connected with each other and come back to the theme of vision and non-vision – sometimes metaphorically, sometimes concretely, sometimes quite humorously. But first of all, the assemblages convey how the artist himself sees nature and the world that surrounds him. The works are tantamount to abstract perception, to an aesthetically open reordering of the world.

On the floor of the second part of the space, there is a patch made of parquetry sealed with shiny resin. The trompe-l'oeil object illustrates the handicraft refinement of Elfgén's works: a surface fitted together like a parquet floor emerges from left-over scraps of wood. Elfgén's technical brilliance is also apparent in the landscapes displayed in the exhibition – maybe those landscapes from which the objects of the assemblages originate. Here forests, mountain ranges, or lakes blend beneath shiny surfaces into various gradations of blue, violet, pink and orange. They often convey the impression of being bathed in the intensive light of a sunset. But the closer one approaches the pictures, the more abstract they appear. These are images which immediately

SPRÜTH MAGERS BERLIN LONDON

captivate the viewer through the atmospheres which they evoke. Their conceptual force is only revealed upon a closer scrutiny. Nature and art inseparably merge within these works. Elfgen has treated materials such as water stain, sawdust, artificial silk, aluminum foil, epoxide resin, and plywood in a process that gives rise to special surface structures reminiscent of tiny water bubbles or honeycombs. The natural, actually grown and creaturely-coincidental comes to expression not only in the pressed plants and their imprints which he uses in some of the pictures. All of the landscapes are kept so transparent that even the grain of the picture-carrying wood plays a striking compositional role. It structures the pictorial space in an undulating manner and thereby repeatedly imitates the lines of clouds and forests, of horizon and ocean.

Robert Elfgen's technically innovative bricolage-art is of course not devoid of art-historical reference. His associative treatment of objets trouvés recalls Marcel Duchamp; his strict conceptual logic is reminiscent of Rosemarie Trockel, who taught his masterclass. And clear allusions to the Romantic pictorial language of painters such as William Turner or Caspar David Friedrich, along with traces of a laconicism coming from Surrealism and Pop Art can be identified in the works brought together for this exhibition. But with his artisanal investigations, Elfgen achieves something attained by only a few artists – the creation of an utterly personal, unique cosmos. A cosmos that opens up a series of spaces of biographical, phenomenological, and psychoanalytical interpretation. A cosmos in which nature and civilization merge into each other, and which enables the viewer to see the world in a new and subtle manner.

Robert Elfgen studied first with John Armleder at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig before transferring to the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he completed his studies as a master scholar of Rosemarie Trockel. He lives and works in Cologne. His works will be shown in a solo exhibition at the Oldenburger Kunstverein in spring 2015, solo presentations of recent years were *development*, Sprüth Magers, Berlin, 2012, *des bien ich*, Sprüth Magers, Cologne, 2008; *expedition*, westlondonprojects, London, 2006; and *1 + 1 = 3 Elfgen Technik*, Bonner Kunstverein, 2005. Moreover, he participated in group exhibitions at the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg and the Lentos Kunstmuseum Linz (2013-14), the Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2012), the Städtische Galerie Karlsruhe (2011), in *Paul Thek in the Context of Today's Contemporary Art*, ZKM Karlsruhe (2007-2008) and at the Kunstverein Kassel (2006).

Sprüth Magers Berlin is concurrently presenting the solo exhibition *No Drones* by Louise Lawler and the group show *Arte Povera and 'Multipli', Torino 1970-1975* curated by Elena Re.

For more information and press enquiries, please contact Silvia Baltschun (sb@spruethmagers.com).

Exhibition Opening: 14.11.2014, 6 – 9 pm

Opening Times of the Gallery: Tue – Sat, 11 am – 6 pm