

Jakob Kolding *self, portraits*

Galleri Nicolai Wallner is pleased to present *self, portraits*, a solo exhibition by Jakob Kolding.

With *self, portraits*, Kolding has turned his gaze inwards, exploring the role of the self and its relation to the world around it. In so doing, he has created a visual lexicon that draws on the historical canons of the visual arts, literature and the theatre. Building layer upon layer, he actualises a world that is as richly complex as it is aesthetically beautiful. Playing with performance and staging, *self, portraits* puts forward a poignant visual narrative of the ways in which roles and identities are acted out and created.

In recent years, Kolding's practice has shifted, focusing on a more physical presence. Expanding on the cut and paste technique he is known for, cutout sculptures become three-dimensional collages, incorporating the space and the visitors.

self, portraits invites us in to a scenographic landscape. The cutout sculptures are brought together with textile elements that emphasise their sculptural qualities, moveable folding screens which both divide and create space, and traditional collages on paper which are dispersed throughout, giving way to small, dioramic worlds. The installation is punctuated by large-scale lambdas whose surface and size expose the nature of the original source material.

This shift to more theatrical underpinnings is visibly present, and it is tempting to think that Kolding's recent work on stage design and scenography for an original opera adaptation of the Virginia Woolf book *To the Lighthouse* for the renowned Bregenzer Festspiele in a collaboration with Kunsthau Bregenz has influenced this shift from a more subtle and understated approach to more dramatic gestures and overtures.

As you move through the almost labyrinth-like space, the pieces reveal and conceal themselves in turn, in a sense echoing the way our identities are composed through a variety of elements and differing situations. Just as a costume or a prop can dramatically alter the portrayal of a character on stage, or an item of clothing can change our understanding of a person, each work puts forward another version of an identity, another version of a portrait of the self.

The exhibition title, with the simple addition of a comma, illustrates just how fragile and fluid this relationship between the self and its surroundings can be, and it is within the crux of this relationship that Kolding's focus lies.

His depiction of portraits and self-portraits creates an intimate feeling, yet these are not portraits in the classical sense that are based on showing a physical likeness. Instead, chosen forms of self-representation are put forward. Emblematic of this new approach is a cutout sculpture in which an abstract figure from a drawing by the American artist Robert Motherwell stands in as a self-portrait by Kolding.

There is a clear impression that the works and the elements put forward are deeply personal to Kolding, as they become him in a sense, yet to the viewer they remain open to individual interpretations and applications. This idea of subjective interpretations and associative narratives leading to explorations of identity as created in a continuous dialogue between context and individual action has long been a focal point of Kolding's practice, and this exhibition brings it into decisively new territory.

In this context, *self, portraits* can be understood as repeated attempts by the artist to understand his own sense of identity.

Jakob Kolding (b. 1971, Denmark) has exhibited extensively throughout the world, and can be found in the public collections of MoMA (New York), the National Gallery of Denmark (Copenhagen), Wien Museum (Vienna), Kunsthau Bregenz (Bregenz) and the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) among many others. In 2017, he has had solo shows at Centre d'Édition Contemporaine (Geneva), ACUD Gallery (Berlin), the Cobra Museum for Modern Art (Amstelveen) alongside Corbusier and created the stage design and scenography for an original opera for the Bregenzer Festspiele in collaboration with Kunsthau Bregenz.