

# GALERIE NÄCHST ST. STEPHAN ROSEMARIE SCHWARZWÄLDER

WALTER SWENNEN **Tambula malembe**

March 17 – April 28, 2018

We are pleased to present new works by Walter Swennen in his show "Tambula malembe," his second solo exhibition at the Galerie nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder. At the same time, we are also presenting the installation "Geschichte der Psyche" (History of the Psyche) by Elisabeth von Samsonow in the LOGIN.

When asked to provide a title for his show, Walter Swennen happened to notice a page in a book about Congolese painters. On it was the picture of a painting by the artist MOKE (1950-2001) from Kinshasa. It shows the singer of a Rumba band with the written refrain "Tambula malembe," a song by the Congolese musician Vadio Mambenga (ca. 1940-1990), coming out of his mouth. In a footnote in the catalogue, he found the translation "allons-y doucement," which Swennen associated with "Easy Does It," a song by Lester Young from the Swing era. So, "let's take it easy."

Swennen creates his pictures much in the same way he finds titles: by working with associations and improvisation. Maître Moke, whose pictures he saw almost every day at a poet friend's house in the 1970s, showed him what he calls the "universal beauty of corrugated tin roofs" in Kinshasa. For Swennen, painting is not based on a concept; instead, everything depends on encounters, on improvising at different speeds, on highly singular individualities that can only be found where they are. All of Walter Swennen's work is marked by a search for what is unforeseeable and contradictory in painting. His works are experiments with – and investigations of – motifs, language, signs, techniques, picture supports, meaning, and expressiveness.

Originally a Beatnik poet and Happening-participant, Swennen turned to painting as his preferred means of expression in the early 1980s. "A painting is always an image of a painting," he said a decade later. In his eyes, the goal of painting is painting itself. It is the translation of what we absorb from the world around us, which in Swennen's case includes such varied sources as comics, literature, encyclopedias, children's drawings, advertising, and Pop Art. His execution of painting is characterized by a love for forms of resistance, deviation, and relativization, which is why marginality, absurdity, and tragicomedy define his pictorial world. Swennen's visual poetry explores the relationships between symbols, legibility, meaning, and painterly craftsmanship, which he understands as analogies for the rhetorical figures of irony, paradox, and antithesis.

Walter Swennen was born 1946 in Brussels, Belgium. He lives and works in Brussels.

Selected solo exhibitions: *Ein perfektes Alibi*, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2015); *So Far So Good*, WIELS, Brussels (2013-14); *Continuer*, Culturgest, Lisbon (2013); *Garibaldi Slept Here*, Kunstverein Freiburg (2011); *How To Paint A Horse*, Cultuurcentrum Strombeek and De Garage, Mechelen (2008); MUHKA, Antwerp (1994); Kunsthall Rotterdam (1994); Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent (1993); Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1986). Selected collections: Belgacom art collection, Brussels; Centre national des arts plastiques, Paris; Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerp; Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent; FRAC Auvergne; FRAC Bretagne; FRAC Languedoc-Roussillon, and many other international private collections.

## IM LOGIN: ELISABETH VON SAMSONOW **Geschichte der Psyche (History of the Psyche)**

No other piece of furniture has such an unusual name as the *psyche* (a type of vanity or dressing table). With its mirror and drawers, it is most often found in the intimate space of the bedroom, where it serves as an object for self-admiration and an instrument of autoeroticism. In Elisabeth von Samsonow's installation "History of the *Psyche*," which she conceived especially for the LOGIN, she assembled a group of *psyches* from the 1950s, when the artist was born (the popularity of the *psyche* also reached its zenith in the 1950s and '60s). She arranged the *psyches* in the installation in such a way that, when we look into the mirrors, we become fragmented in a web of multiple reflections. The LOGIN's two large windows act as ocular openings through which our eyes behold the camera (in the sense of a chamber), as if we are looking through a spotting scope, with the mirrors arranged along the "retina" in the back of the room.

The mirrors not only reveal a legion of images of ourselves; an object also appears that we were unable to see before: Elisabeth von Samsonow's large white sculpture "Idol," which resembles a Cycladic figurine. Along with serving as a source of inspiration for modernist sculptors like Brancusi, these figures have a special significance for the artist as symbols of a concealed psychic activity (in a cultural stratigraphy). Von Samsonow's "History of the *Psyche*" thus works like a display in which art and psychology are bound together through idolatry, effecting the erotic touch of our gaze into the *psyche*. It is only when we look in the mirrors that we see our reflection and the idol at the same time. This form of idolatry harkens back to an older layer of the soul, which is also an older layer of art. By reflecting our body as shattered into pieces next to the structurally integral idol, the installation playfully inverts how we experience our physical self as whole and our soul as fragmented in a critical comment on the state of the soul/*psyche* today.

Elisabeth von Samsonow is an artist and Professor of Philosophical and Historic Anthropology of Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She was also visiting professor at the Bauhaus University in Weimar (2012–2013). In her art, she focuses on the systematic place of sculpture in the art canon, the geo-logic of the body, the interaction between bodies and media, and the (re-)invention of subjectivity.

Selected exhibitions: *Austrian Performance Season*, Solyanka State Gallery, Moscow (2017); *Transplants*, Dominikanerkirche, Krems (2016); *The Nervous System of the Earth*, Galerie Jünger, Vienna (2014)  
[www.samsonow.net](http://www.samsonow.net), <http://pages.akbild.ac.at/kunstanthropologie>