

Press release

Gods in Exile. Salvador Dalí, Albert Oehlen et al.
3 pages

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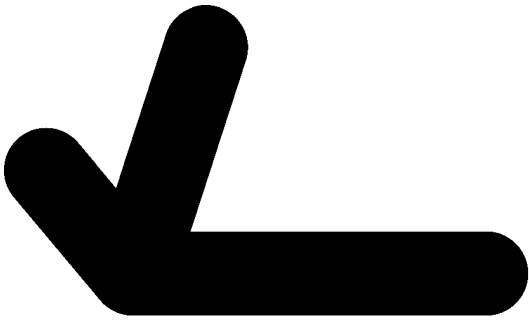
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Gods in Exile Salvador Dalí, Albert Oehlen et al.

In the history of the romantic view of the artist, the artist as a myth or as a pop star goes back very far. Like many others, Albert Oehlen has reflected intensely on this role, which – in an interplay with works by Christian Ludwig Attersee, Arnold Böcklin, Salvador Dalí, Philippe Halsman and Karel Teige – leads to this exhibition about the metamorphosis and mythology of the artist.

Albert Oehlen's paintings not only stimulate the eye and excite the viewer's senses almost to the limits of over-stimulation; but are also concerned with tradition, despite all appearances. Arnold Böcklin is as much an inspiration to him as his former painter colleague and counterpart in some joint projects, Martin Kippenberger. For Oehlen, pictures are the basis for other pictures: one development follows another; there is nothing without a past or without a future. His work is a matter of assembling and collaging whatever he comes across. For his picture montages, collages are a significant instrument – they can be recognised as set pieces of something else, and then appear downright naked, like fresh pictures removed from their original context, fragments in a new context. Just like the pictures, the titles of his works result from a search of his daily experience with the pictures. Ambiguous and enigmatic, they seduce with hints and promise a mystery that no-one can solve. Like the artist himself, they are real sirens in their otherness, their non-fulfilment of expectations and the criticism with mischievous gibes that this involves.

Mixing the ordinary into a hybrid that creates out-of-the-ordinary registers had already happened in enigmatic form in Arnold Böcklin's work. Between 1850 and 1900, the Swiss painter created an extensive body of painting in which various levels of reality came together in a most original fashion. The world encountered the divine. The divine was worldly pleasure, and painting became the discoverer of direct, earthy and at the same time disconcertingly distanced pairings. Böcklin ventures onto a terrain that was subsequently further processed in the art of the 20th century just because of its impurity of styles and its mixture of the worlds of the imagination. Just as the mixtures of styles broke with certain conventions, they allowed in turn other stylisations to be accepted and follow other registers. It is no surprise therefore that no irony

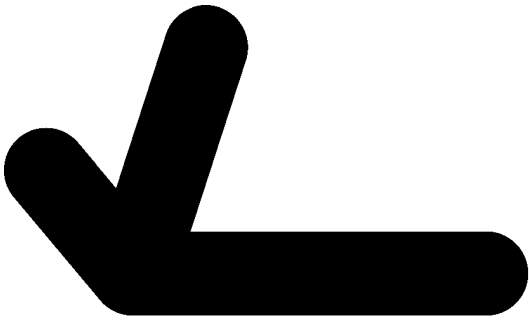


was intended when the portraits of the Böcklin family were crowned with the laurels of immortality in their rustic crudeness. The mythologisation of one's own artistic figure is of particularly ambivalent consequence, since "non omnis moriar" ("not everything of me will die") is written on Böcklin's artistic grave, in the words of an epigram by the classical prince of poets and artistic ideal Horace, the content of which admits both a Christian and a purely creative interpretation.

Only one artist has really taken the mythologisation of himself to extremes in art – Salvador Dalí, a member of the Surrealist group, at least until he was excluded from the group in 1934 because of his constantly growing self-obsession and his provocative inclination towards totalitarianism. Dalí was not particularly interested in collage as a physical technique, instead internalising the process in his paintings. Dabbling with the psychoanalysis of Freud and Lacan, he made virtual montages of his own subconscious pictures and called his form of montage the "paranoiac-critical method". The paranoiac-critical method presumed that Dalí's picture compositions were generated subconsciously, that his pictures flowed together into a whole in his inner self. Dalí may not do classic collages or montages, but his pictures often consist of recurrent elements that he recognises in the irrational dream state, combining them and subsequently "critically" investigating them in the composition of the picture. It follows from this that Dalí's pictures almost always show a threatening, spooky world haunted with delusions where reality and dream, hallucination and sexuality and above all – and in this respect he is like Arnold Böcklin in his self-reference – personal and mythological elements complement each other.

Philippe Halsman, whom Dalí got to know in the USA, added to the Dalí myth. From the 1940s onwards, Halsman produced surreal portraits of Dalí in close collaboration with the artist, where the photomontage follows the paranoiac compositional method.

One Austrian painter who, like Dalí, made himself the subject of his own work, and with which he achieved an equally ambivalent and provocative success in 1960s Germany and Austria, is Christian Ludwig Attersee. Stylised into an artist god, he made the Olympus of the Austrian bourgeoisie – with the monopolising of the liberal holiday resort of Attersee – his own creation. The handsome Attersee is a painter and self-painter, a musician and filmmaker. Most of all however he is one thing – a mixer of realities and tonalities whose works allow no secure positions for the frontiers between styles.



A little less famous is the work of Czech Surrealist and critic Karel Teige, who belongs to the most important figures of Czech modernism. When he said in his “poetic manifesto” of 1924, that art was a game, he was thinking primarily not of the urge to play but of the importance of freedom in art. Nothing should disturb the artist in his creative work; conventions and traditions should neither govern nor cramp him. Only the aimless, playful search for the meaningful and the freedom of irrational poetry could in his view reveal the true picture of what lies behind the public world. The producer of some breathtaking small collages mainly for personal relaxation and as an exercise in concentration, Teige was interested in a new kind of poetry, where he combined words and pictures to create a new type of poem.

Curators: Peter Pakesch, Katrin Bucher
Assistant curator: Katia Schurl

Opening times: March 04 – May 07 2006
Tue - Sun 10 a.m. – 6 p.m., Thu 10 a.m. – 8 p.m.
Kunsthhaus Graz, Space02