

Galerie Francesca Pia

Josef Strau

How to be an Angel Painter

June 8 – July 20, 2019

Opening Friday June 7, 2019, 18–21

Galerie Francesca Pia is pleased to announce *How to be an Angel Painter*, an exhibition of new works by Josef Strau. This is Strau's second exhibition with the gallery. The works include two new series. In the front space of the gallery Strau shows a collection of the texts / posters that have accompanied each of his exhibitions. Hung amongst these are the final works from his series of *Tin Icons* begun two years ago. In the main spaces two series, *Angel's Alphabet* and *Angel's Scores* are interspersed against the text / poster for the current exhibition. Strau has executed each on either wood panels or canvases with compositions of tin and brass complemented by drawings made with decidedly non-high-art materials (pencil, ballpoint pen, marker). All works were created in 2019.

Josef Strau lives in New York. Recent institutional solo exhibitions include Künstlerhaus Bremen (2017), Secession, Vienna (2015) and The Renaissance Society (2014). Recent institutional group exhibitions include at Kunsthalle Bern (2017), Kunsthaus Hamburg (2016), Liverpool Biennial (2014) and Halle für Kunst, Luneberg (2014).

For this exhibition I felt intensely determined to abandon everything I did before and to find something new and different, to make a hard cut again for once, in relation to my exhibitions before at least. But I had to learn hard by doing such a grave artistic mistake, that it lead me into a lonely exile and a maelstrom of desperations and during one more of many sleepless and dark felt nights it all got so oppressive and even physically painful, that when I finally decided I would do the very same thing as the last exhibition, I imagined both I myself and the world around would be good again. With sudden relief from the torment of my former reasonable and well meant intentions I made even a more radically far reaching decision: I will try to show the angels again. Same as last time, same size, same number even. And it worked for me. I got immediately to be a good artist again, by observing the hermeneutics of the concealed tool of the inversive return, so to say. I had none of the rare tin metal left to use as skin or total cover of the former tattoo and Theophanes inspired angel images, only all the many small tin metal scraps on the still untidy studio floor that fell down from the metal cutting of the former show. So I soldered the small leftovers together like fabric of waste.

That was the softest I could get into since a long time. I used to believe earlier that I do deep transcendental echoes of icon paintings but I just was using it as art practice to act out my most toxic parts of personality. I enjoyed cutting metals without idea, I raved in stroking and beating it, then I excelled in further trampling on it, in torturing it with knives that I suddenly was collecting, and burn it with super hot sticks. When considering colors I chose colors but not according to their visual or tonal qualities but because of the smell they make when being burnt, preferring some chemical enamels because they smell most ugly. Sometimes becoming aware of the toxic interior misery, I praised my erroneous delirium as per aspera as astra styled alchemical acts to be the necessary ingredients to any artistic creation. Icon painting is supposed to be writing, I claimed, and with the burning metals and the smoking enamels compounded in fumes with incredible stench and poisonous vapour turning into long garlands of mysterious texts or at least into letters that are being written into my room or spin slowly into the canvas of my lungs.

I never

was aware of the structure of my sublime and destructive aspect of my ways of making art for years. If I was another artist, I would have seen its inherent digressiveness easily and would have despised such expression of toxic personality traits. As famously said, the devil enjoys most of all if we reject the bad patterns in someone else and therefore makes it the most difficult to detect them in myself.

In simple words I started to learn from

observing the inherent condition of my acts and as well wanted to start to listen in search of invoking imminent and sustainable changes.

The very day after I abandoned the idea of a cut in production and leaving behind the creatio ex nihilo phantasma, I saw the Times page about Vivian Suter. The very same moment without reading it I understood why I had liked her ways of working. It reveals so obviously the purest opposite of my own ways. I saw as if from afar, how in times of production challenges I incessantly gravel through the ruthlessly harsh closed space of my interior tunnel of work obsessions and most accordingly lived in exteriorly narrow closed spaces as well too often.

As if chosen and in the moment of revelation I got to see a photo of Suter's view from her studio, which is showing the most open and bright landscape space. I decide to print it out and put it on the studio wall to declare with it the beginning of my new direction even as I returned to the same theme. I kept zooming in and zooming out into the photo from my workshop table and weaved the tiny metal left over's together smoothly into new patterns as if following their new smoothest qualities. I abandoned the cutting, the trampling, the burning and hurting and replaced it by what I called the sutering of the material.

I remembered seeing early on sometimes older drawings of angels made in an art nouveau manner, but could

not recall the name of the artist who long fascinated by a certain angel painting of Simeon

Solomon, protecting the three boys in horrible danger of being killed by the soldiers of Nebukadnezzar as punishment for their refusal to obey the king and his golden image, reminding us that such disobedience is usually blessed by the supernatural spirit.

Starting an attempt to copy the watercolor suddenly the name of the other angel painter came back to me, it was Ephraim Moses

Lilien from early 20th century at the time called the first Zionist artist and now immediately found many of his drawings on the iPhone. In his printing works his angels are not so much as in other cases during similar art movements of the time characterized by using the angel for representing and glamorizing somebody within personal physical features, but rather by the relation to a depicted subject matter, to an event or to a situation that takes place under the angels wings. I started immediately to project one of such protective wings of Lilien (the wing over the prophets arrival to the promised land) onto the panels, repetitively drawing the same one in the end onto all of them and placing the interwoven metal works into the space so to say below the wing, handing them over and that way to not only exhibiting them as objects but to describe the evidence of the subjective time space and its encounters during producing them.

Epilogue

Whenever I met some person randomly and then being asked where I am from and then what I am doing, whenever that was a person looking like they are having a real job and are really hard working I felt I could not tell them. It was a bunch of reasons, real respect too, like that person all of them they really build America and felt I cannot compare I am so ridiculous in comparison, so I maneuvered around stuttered and they look at me and it is all over, and I still try to explain what it is. I must have felt deeply uncomfortable, I know by now, because it all changed. One day I had the same question at the corner and I told that

I am an artist, as always what kind of an artist I was asked and then what do you paint? I paused took all my courage and said

"I paint angels" that was so a biggest moment situation, just not hiding any more, not maneuvering not feeling low, alone for

saying it, but then the person asked in surprise in disbelief again, and I said it again. Stepping back in excitement the

person said that is the most amazing thing I heard of, and asked "You are living from that?" I said, yeah I do, it

is really great. And it is really true. Some people in my neighborhood they know about me by now

and that I am just painting angels and they seem happy with it and I am too and

with opening up and having the

angel job I have no fears

to tell whatever I do any more, like in the song,

until death

your love

sees

me

through.