

Wilde

PRESS RELEASE

MATHIEU DAFFLON

FACEWALK / JUMPROPE

02.04. - 27.05.2022

WILDE | BASEL

Wilde is pleased to announce Mathieu Dafflon's solo exhibition, *Facewalk / Jumprope*. This is Dafflon's first solo exhibition in Basel and the third with the gallery.

Jumprope refers to a child's game, playful learning, fun, and entertainment. *Facewalk*, on the other hand, is a vulgar expression that stands for failure, for "flying on one's face," and for nevertheless dragging oneself along in this uncomfortable situation, for somehow carrying on. *Facewalk / Jumprope* is about the coming together of these two poles. In Mathieu Dafflon's work, the artist is not a genius who provides us with universal answers to pressing questions. Rather, the artist acts as a sarcastic comedian and wistful observer. Dafflon's exhibition is a playground where one can go on a personal journey of discovery - playful, failing, without dogmatism, but all the more fun.

In the center of the exhibition hangs a monumental painting that shows, in absurd enlargement, a broken cup. On it is the image of a comic character: a little devil with his eyes wide open and panting with exertion. The character comes from the series "Cow and Chicken." The notorious villain repeatedly lures the good-natured cow and chicken into various traps and frightens them with his often prominently staged nudity. In Dafflon's painting, he holds his skinny legs up with his hands to sit on his rear end. Moving around in this pose is the so-called "buttwalk." This is not only mastered by the devil from the comic series but is also practiced as a strength exercise by numerous fitness fanatics, as evidenced by countless videos on YouTube or Instagram.

Two other large paintings depict childishly painted grimaces. *Saturday* shows an oversized head with a brush cut, protruding ears, red-rimmed, torn eyes and a mouth contorted into a grin. The nose is emblazoned obscenely large in the center of the face. The painting *Sunday* shows an exceedingly upset head. Its eyes are riddled with red veins like they are about to burst, while the eyebrows come together in a frown line. The mouth shows the bared teeth, with the canines protruding above the lip like vampire fangs. Even the pointed nose and hair stubble look threatening. One can almost hear a growl coming from the oversized apparition.

Dafflon paints the faces of *Saturday* and *Sunday* simply in order to underline the purity of emotion. Their size corresponds to the intensity of their content. On the other hand, they somehow seem false, artificially inflated. This is because Dafflon originally painted the pictures in a small A4 format, and then he enlarged them several times and copied and painted them in meticulous handwork. As a result, they look a bit as if a bad photograph had been printed too large and the quality too poor. The attempt to capture the childlike imagination and the emotions conveyed by the faces in all their size, meaning, and detail fails - *Facewalk*.

Dafflon finds various ways to pull the weight of meaning of the images into the ridiculous and amusing. In the picture *Saturday*, a vase is enthroned in the middle of the face, with "faire l'amour" written. A hope for Saturday evening, the only day of the week when there is free space for such pleasure? After all, Saturday and Sunday represent the two days that, even for adults, still contain certain freedom and possibility for escape, far from the daily work routine and clocked habits. On the pointed nose of *Sunday's* grumpy face, there is another surprise: instead of pimples, blackheads, and bulbous noses, glass marbles have been painted with great love and fascination, referring to the idleness and uneventful passing of time on a Sunday.

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Marbles also appear in some of the smaller paintings. They are painted on an abstract background, in which not infrequently shadowy grimaces and fantasy figures can be discovered. Some are transparent, others matte; they are striped, marbled and dotted. Memories arise of one's childhood, of the fascination one had with the variously crafted glass marbles, of the endless time one could spend playing with them, throwing them, of the shapes and figures they form when they land scattered on the floor. In other pictures, on similar abstract backgrounds, there are broken motif cups that have been haphazardly glued back together. These have something melancholic about them. Thus, the cup with the imprint "No. 1 Daddy" makes one think of not-so-idyllic family life and the function of a role model, which is broken. Shattered glass, jugs and amphorae refer to the wreckage of adult life or even civilization.

Although all of these smaller paintings function as independent works, they share a common link. The abstract background, which is not infrequently kitschy and overstuffed, is copied from a painting from the 1950s. Dafflon used the painting "Encounter of the Worlds" by the expressionist artist Karel Appel and repainted it as closely as possible. With his careful and deliberate copying, he takes Appel's spontaneous gesture, marked by strength, conviction and self-confidence, to the absurd. But it is not only the self-confidence and authority that disintegrates in Dafflon's copy. After completing his copy, Dafflon cut it up and divided it into several small pieces. From these, he created the paintings we see in the exhibition. The encounter of the worlds disintegrates into fragments, into independent individual moments, into poetic contemplations of marbles and everyday rituals such as drinking coffee in the morning or beer in the evening, into holding on to cherished objects, to individual and personal memories that can mean the world to one person, but nothing to another, to be just garbage.

Text by Dr. Martina Venanzoni

Martina Venanzoni holds a Ph.D. in art history. She was curator of the exhibition "Shift in Progress" at the Shift Festival for Electronic Arts in Basel 2009 - 2011 and a research assistant at Schaulager Basel 2013 - 2018. Currently, she is working as curatorial director of FATart and as a freelance art historian. Her previous essays include "Spielregeln und Spielräume / Playing the Game," in Kathy Halbreich et al. (eds.): Bruce Nauman: Disappearing Acts (Ausst.-Kat.), Basel: Laurenz-Stiftung, Schaulager / New York: MoMA, 2018 and "Corpo-Real Technologies: Towards a Posthumanist Aesthetics of Information and Body," in Oliver Ruf and Lars Grabbe (eds.): Techno-Aesthetics. On the material and receptive systematization of techno-aesthetic reality, Bielefeld: transcript, 2022 (in preparation).

Mathieu Dafflon was awarded the Prix de la Ville de Genève in 2014 and the Prix Hirzel in 2016. His work was first exhibited at Art Bärtschi & Cie, now Wilde, in 2016, in a solo show titled *WPO WPA WPC IPF*. Other solo shows with his work include those at Wilde (Geneva and Basel, Switzerland), Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp (Cully, Switzerland) and Salle Crosnier, Palais de l'Athénée (Geneva, Switzerland), following his award of the Prix Hirzel. Dafflon's work has been featured in several group shows, including those at the Centre d'Art Contemporain (Geneva, Switzerland), Spielact Festival (Geneva, Switzerland), MAH - Musée d'Art et d'Histoire (Geneva, Switzerland) and Centre d'Art Contemporain (Geneva, Switzerland). His work is included in the collections of FMAC - Fonds d'art contemporain de la Ville de Genève and Collection Banque Mirabaud.

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