

WALTER SWENNEN

Galerie Nicolas Krupp is pleased to present its fourth exhibition of the Belgian artist Walter Swennen in Basel. Born in Brussels in 1946, the artist is one of the internationally very influential figures in contemporary painting. The current exhibition in Basel features forty paintings and gouaches created between 2018 and 2022. The show follows the extensive and acclaimed museum retrospective "The Phantom of Painting," which was shown in Bonn, The Hague, and Winterthur in 2021 and 2022.

Walter Swennen's oeuvre is defined by the ongoing questioning of the medium of painting. The artist works in and with different scales, styles, materials, and degrees of abstraction. His art is infused with a specific sense of dry humor. The references Swennen uses range from contemporary pop and media culture to art history. Again and again the painter returns to the ambiguity of image and language as a central motif of his art. The image-text relationship runs like a red thread through his entire oeuvre. In a 2015 interview Swennen explained: "I've always thought there was a contradiction between images and language. But in fact, this is only a secondary contradiction, as Mao would have put it. The real contradiction lies between images and language, on the one hand, and painting, on the other."

The current exhibition includes, among other things, references to Norwegian painter Edvard Munch ("Hello, Edvard", 2019), the palette of Giorgio de Chirico ("Meanwhile", 2019), zodiac signs ("Untitled", 2022), pirate stories ("Captain Piet", 2019) dogs ("Untitled", 2021) and gangster stories ("Untitled", 2022). The large-scale painting "Lokomotiv" (2018) shows a schematized front view of a gigantic green steam locomotive with a Soviet star, above which the title of the painting floats in Cyrillic characters. In a pointed way, the picture hints at the historical railroad myth in the by-gone "Soviet Century". This myth rooted, among other things, in Karl Marx, who once described revolutions as "locomotives of history." In the spring of 1917, Vladimir Lenin famously traveled in a sealed train on a revolutionary mission from Zurich to Petrograd (now Saint Petersburg). A short time later, between 1918 and 1920, Leon Trotsky commanded the Red Army in the Russian Civil War from a personal armored train.

Walter Swennen was born in Brussels in 1946. During his childhood, in the early fifties, he taught himself to draw by copying Mickey Mouse magazines, Tintin and Spirou albums. In the mid-sixties, Swennen briefly studied philosophy, but soon switched to engraving at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. In the sixties and seventies Swennen studied psychology and was active as a professor, lecturer, poet, writer and squatter. At the beginning of the eighties he resumed his visual-artistic work as a drawing artist and painter. This resulted in continuous exhibition activities up to the present.

The collaboration between Walter Swennen and Nicolas Krupp dates back to 2006. Artist and gallerist met following the 2005 milestone exhibition "La Belgique visionnaire" at Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, curated by Harald Szeemann. In 2006, Swennen exhibited for the first time at Galerie Nicolas Krupp in Basel. In 2021 and 2022, the comprehensive Swennen retrospective "The Phantom of Painting" was shown at Kunstmuseum Bonn (Germany), Kunstmuseum Den Haag (Netherlands), and Kunst Museum Winterthur (Switzerland). Other recent institutional and retrospective exhibitions include "A Perfect Alibi" at Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Germany (2015), "So far so good," Wiels, Centre d'art contemporain, Brussels, Belgium (2013/14), and "Continuer" at Culturgest, Lisbon, Portugal (2013).

Kito Nedo, Basel, December 2022