

Press Release

Enrico David

Destroyed Men Come and Go

10 June – 20 August 2023

The exhibition at KW Institute for Contemporary Art will mark Enrico David's (b. 1966, IT) first institutional solo exhibition in Germany and will be devoted solely to his sculptural practice.

David works with sculpture, painting, textiles, and installation, while drawing is also central to his exploration of form. Mining a space between figuration and abstraction, he consistently returns to the body as a point of departure, exploring the human figure as a metaphor for transformation. Conveying the struggle of adaptation of the self and the image, Enrico David's sculptures critically elaborate on the body's autonomy through its different stages of non-being and becoming.

In KW's main hall and on the ground floor, the sculptures will be exhibited in a spatial arrangement without walls, touching upon the concept of nothingness, and setting the scene for a silent non-space; a time without a present, a space of waiting and suspense. Having fallen out of being and caught in a constant mode of performative transformation, the artists anthropomorphic sculptures are punctual confrontations between themselves and their onlooker, caught in a struggle to appear as absolutes.

Curatorial Introduction

KW is pleased to present the exhibition *Destroyed Men Come and Go* by the Italian artist Enrico David, who is based in London. Solely devoted to his sculptural practice, it marks David's first institutional solo exhibition in Germany. With over 30 years of working in sculpture, David has established himself as one of the most remarkable artists of his generation.

Enrico David works in sculpture, painting, textiles, and installation, with drawing being key to his exploration of form. Mining a space between figuration and abstraction, David returns to the body as a point of departure, exploring the human figure as a metaphor for transformation. David's interest in British and European modern sculpture has shaped his work, taking inspiration from the likes of Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Alberto Giacometti, while, at the same time, retaining an idiosyncratic aesthetic and provocatively ambiguous language. Made from bronze, silkscreen, steel, and plaster polymer, David's human figures assume various poses, often entering a dialogue with the architecture that surrounds them – hugging the floor, leaning against walls, or being suspended from the ceiling. Through references to anatomy, metamorphosis permeates their forms and connects these works with nature. This continuous morphing is further mirrored in David's manipulation of materials, with modelling and casting obscuring any clear understanding of their material origin.

Taken from a quote of Maurice Blanchot, the exhibition's title elaborates on the relation of existence, speech, and the void in Samuel Beckett's momentous theatre play *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and its allegory of the collapse of the rational mind. In his *Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot

writes “We have fallen out of being, outside where, immobile, proceeding with a slow and even step, destroyed men come and go,” describing humanity’s fall from grace in the Anthropocene. Conveying the struggle of adaptation of the self, David’s sculptures pick up on Blanchot’s thoughts on subjectivity and critically unfold the body’s autonomy through different stages of non-beings and becomings.

David favors time travel to connect the way the body is depicted into different states of being through various periods of global civilization – whether this is sleeping, hanging, relaxing, or decaying form. His references are deliberately naïve and broad, including nods towards the Maya culture, the Tang Dynasty, or the Wiener Werkstätte. However, David’s appropriations are recontextualized to focus on their formal and universal qualities, in which dysmorphic shapes, created, for example, by photographic documentation, offer new opportunities for human and non-human figuration. The artist’s work is replete with these disembodied personae, which, for all their vulnerability and grotesqueness, are frequently considered to be self-portraits. The notion of anthropomorphism is an ongoing thread in David’s work that has limbs extend furniture and bodies dissolve to manifest ornamentation. This is a repetitive and circular process, shaping and reshaping the human form and continuously making it anew. These imageries grapple with forms of surrealism in which its theatricality confronts our modernist understanding of abstraction.

The exhibition at KW starts with a three-dimensional assemblage, which takes on the form of a diorama, a picture-viewing device that originated in 1823. The word’s literal translation is “through that which is seen,” from the Greek di- “through” + orama “that which is seen, a sight.” The world David unfolds here features an image of a sculpture from the ancient Maya, a male figure in a relaxing pose that appears to be pregnant, as well as an image he borrowed from artist and friend Henrik Olesen in *Some Faggy Gestures* (2008), which depicts a sculpture attached to a Medieval church in Autun with an odd display of its derriere. Bronze limbs of a dismembered body are scattered around these two images, with the somewhat larger drawing operating as a backdrop for the whole scenery. As the title suggests, *Study for Circulation of the Eye: Our Body and the Body of the Thing* (2022) functions as a mechanism for associative reading and formal juxtapositions while simultaneously opening up a space of intimacy. The work operates as an introduction to the exhibition’s *readability* and has the gallery itself function as a scaled-up diorama. The “creatures” inhabiting this world are of awkward sizes, at times mirroring that of an adolescent child. Scale, in general, is an essential element in David’s sculptures, as is the repetition of forms that has them function as an echo.

KW’s main hall presents an unprecedented spatial and theatrical arrangement, a space of waiting and suspense, blurring the lines between drawing, sculpture and theatrical prop. Having fallen out of being and getting caught up in a constant mode of performative transformation, the anthropomorphic creatures and Blanchot’s destroyed men are alike in that they remind us of humanity’s inherent collapse. These timely reflections on the bodily form, its perception, and its threats become mirrors, the reflections of which challenge our existential fears and desires.

The exhibition is accompanied by an artist book which replicates in format and graphic layout the publication *Die Wiener Werkstätte 1903-1928. Modernes Kunstgewerbe und Sein Weg* from 1929. Featuring contributions by Sofia Silva and Henrik Olesen. David sees the book as an extension of the exhibition, where translation, appropriation and editing operate as equivalent processes to his sculptural practice.

Curator: Krist Gruijthuisen

Assistant Curator: Sofie Krogh Christensen

Enrico David (b. 1966, Ancona, Italy) has been the subject of major solo exhibitions at prominent art institutions, including Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Center, Washington, D.C.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Sharjah Art Foundation; Lismore Castle; The Hepworth Wakefield, West Yorkshire; Maramotti Collection, Reggio Emilia; UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; New Museum, New York; Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Seattle Art Museum; and ICA London. In 2019, David represented Italy in the Italian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. David currently lives and works in London.

Public and Mediation Program

Exhibition Opening

9 June, 7 pm

Curator's Tour

With Krist Gruijthuijsen

29 June, 7 pm

Curator's Tour

With Sofie Krogh Christensen

10 August, 7 pm

Artist Talk

With Enrico David

11 August, 3 pm

Focus Tour

With Kiersten Thamm

16 August, 5 pm

Public Guided Tours

Saturday, 17 June, 4 pm / in English

Sunday, 18 June, 4 pm / in German

Saturday, 1 July, 4 pm / in English

Sunday, 2 July, 4 pm / in German

Saturday, 22 July, 4 pm / in English

Sunday, 23 July, 4 pm / in German

Saturday, 5 August, 4 pm / in German

Sunday, 6 August, 4 pm / in English

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