

Urban Zellweger  
*Eight different Ways*  
23.09.–04.11.2023

Weiss Falk is pleased to announce the exhibition Urban Zellweger *Eight different Ways*.

#### Notes on Urban Zellweger

For all the talk of dismantling binaries, we live in the age of the dichotomy. Through our social, political and moral lives it's always like or not, left or right, good or bad, right or wrong. Yet art in its truest and most dynamic form inhabits the pelagic spaces between it all. Urban Zellweger's works have always transgressed styles and mediums, but in this new body of work that transgression, combination and blurring of separate ideas becomes the unifying concept itself. Painting and drawing. Figurative and abstract. Light and dark. Painting and support. Framed and unframed. Interior, Exterior. Movement and stillness. Each of these oppositions is set up and broken within the set and the individual paintings, allowing the work itself to look inward at its own creation, while reflecting a world around it.

One of the earliest paintings I remember seeing of Zellweger's had two floating faces kissing a worm, so that the total effect from afar was that of a butterfly. Like the 19th century optical illusions (a vase appearing within the profile of two faces, a young woman alternately seen as an old hag) that popped up in Jasper Johns's works in the 1980s, Zellweger also finds value in the creation of friction between the act of and the experience of viewing. Here background layers appearing as preparatory gesso coalesce into the icy top of a snow capped mountain, faces breaking through the opacity like reflections waiting for a landslide to bring them down. In the largest work, the composition is built so that the background is visible as its own dark abstract painting, the butterflies sticking mostly to the edges of the work. Neither purely figurative or purely abstract, but viewable as either singularly. At least two paintings concurrently as one.

A tension between ideas of drawing versus painting abound. Canvases are left unprepared as empty pages, the paint brush becomes a pencil of thin fine lines, the wings of a butterfly look like impressionist oil pastel. The greyest area between these two media for centuries has been watercolor, not truly painterly and not really the work of a draftsman. The preparation of the surfaces becomes part of the painting, apparent through the thin washes Zellweger uses that reveal earlier imagery. The washy backgrounds capturing light in their dark show him using oil paint to convey other mediums entirely. In his hands everything is able to be open and be more than its traditional self.

The imagery he chooses, both surreal and based in the oddness of nature, lend themselves to readings of gesture as well. Snails slowly leave gooey traces, the wings of butterflies and houseflies leave movement as they sail around on suggested air. Zellweger uses these traces of the depicted as both illustrations of action and literally the action of the painter's gesture. The temporally imbalanced events, especially between snails and flies, is simply the act of painting itself. Even within an interior scene aspects feel both settled and off, working through renderings apparent across art history and domestic life.

Each of the works and the total set is framed by Zellweger so that the viewer is invited into the act of creation and the breaking of preconceptions imagery usually entails. This continues in the literal framing. Dark wood. Light wood. Painted in illustrational trompe l'oeil. The joy of playing with the possibilities of representation are expanded by refusals and active attempts to draw attention to their usual staidness. I imagine that what makes these works exciting to look at, in the face of centuries of painting piled up in our minds and walls, is the same energy that allows and pushes Zellweger to make them. In his dismantling and reconfiguring of many things at once, he arrives inside a prismatic terrarium appearing something like an unified whole.

- Mitchell Anderson, September 2023



- 1 *On the wall*, 2023  
Oil on canvas, framed  
82.5 × 103 × 3.6 cm
- 2 *Untitled*, 2023  
Oil on canvas, framed  
132.3 × 102.5 × 3.6 cm
- 3 *Untitled*, 2023  
Oil on canvas, framed  
82.7 × 82.7 × 3.6 cm
- 4 *Behind the Canvas I*, 2023  
Oil on canvas  
130 × 100 × 3.6 cm
- 5 *Behind the Canvas II*, 2023  
Oil on canvas  
130 × 100 × 3.6 cm
- 6 *Untitled*, 2023  
Oil on canvas, framed  
193 × 163 × 3.6cm
- 7 *Flying Flies II*, 2023  
Oil on canvas, framed  
132.3 × 102.5 × 3.6 cm
- 8 *Flying Flies I*, 2023  
Oil on canvas, framed  
132.3 × 102.5 × 3.6 cm

