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EMANUEL RÖHSS
HISTORICAL FIGURES
19/01/2023–19/02/2023

Exhibition: 19/01/2023–19/02/2023

Opening: 19/01/2023, 17.00–20.00

ISSUES is happy to present the second solo show at the gallery by Swedish but Los Angeles-based artist Emanuel Röhss. He returns to the subject of vision in relation to time but now, also in relation to fiction. For the exhibition, eight busts have been made using techniques developed in the movie and theatre industries. They are presented on podiums in the gallery where some of them seem to be in conversation with one another. The figures are at the same time historically fictional and fictionally historical. Stepping into the context of each figure, one is not only transported in time but also into other worlds.

For this project, I chose to return to a familiar theme in my work – the notion of time – but approach it from a new angle. Here, I consider historical time, or everything that has transpired since the dawn of man. How is it perceived? Can it be altered, bent or skewed, if famous fictional figures are given equal historical status as their real-life counterparts?

Does Batman belong in the realm of historical or fictional reality? He was “conceived” by human hands, breathed life into through countless retellings of his saga and wields cultural clout. Real people are defined by their roles playing him. So what happens when Batman is added to the pantheon of instantly recognizable historical figures?

About a year ago I started experimenting with certain historical figures, both real and fictional, by placing them side by side at random. I was curious to see if a figure would remain “charged” or lose its charge, when coupled with seemingly arbitrary partners and removed from its original context and canon.

My intention was to install the figures on the same “plane” by giving them homogenous physical and visual properties. That meant reproducing them all using the same method. I opted for hand-sculpting as opposed to 3D printing.

As reference material in the process I used free 3D files found on the internet, rather than photos of the original statue, person, or sculpture. From the 3D files, I shaped the heads in rigid foam and plastelina. The prototypes were then molded in silicone rubber and fiberglass. The subsequent end products were forged in the molds using resin and a method called slush casting.

The casts I was left with resemble the 3D files they were modeled on: they’re hollow and thin, like skins. They’re not as solid as the people, sculptures, or statues they originate from.

“Pinocchio and Pasqua – what a weird combination,” my former assistant Tommaso commented when I showed him a picture from my studio.

What about my choices of figures to include in this group? Well, they were fairly intuitive. I was interested in establishing contrasts: different eras, realities, cultures and so on. At the same time, they needed to be immediately recognizable. Icons.

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My brother came to visit me in LA last summer, and I took him to the Getty Villa – a recreated Roman seaside mansion – as part of a cultural tour.

At the Villa, we encountered a number of Roman bronze heads. They were hollow, like my sculptures. However, the heads lacked eyes of any sort, there were only holes exposing their internal void. The Roman artists didn’t favor bronze for eyes. They fashioned them from materials like glass or porcelain to give them a more life-like appearance. Over time, those eyes disappeared.

Staring into the darkness of those non-eyes was like looking at negative time, at death, or a document of the failure to exist.

The Roman heads influenced several formal decisions in my project. Most importantly, to expose the hollowness of my sculptures, making the eyes windows into the interior from outside, rather than of the exterior world viewed from within.

Eyes, they say, are windows to the soul. Perhaps, then, they're also windows to time – or the lack thereof.

The patina of the Roman heads also intrigued me. Like withered rock, old wood or human flesh, these surfaces had evidently undergone a beating from the passing of time. It gave them a mortal quality, despite lacking a soul (eyes).

I wanted to translate the look of these aged surfaces to my sculptures. But since they aren't made of metal it wasn't a matter of oxidation. I needed to paint the resin to recreate a semblance of bronze patina. Fake bronze à la Hollywood. Another factor complicating their place in time.

Historical fiction and fictive historicity. I am hopeful that this body of work occupies a region between those poles.

EMANUEL RÖHSS (b. 1985 Gothenburg) lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the Royal College of Art, London, where he received an MA in Painting, as well as at the National College of Art and Design, Dublin (BA Painting), and Valand Academy (BFA Fine Art).

The artist has exhibited extensively both in Sweden and internationally. Recent solo shows include Galerie Nordenhake Focus, Stockholm (2022); Gothenburg Museum of Art (2021-22); Coma Gallery, Sidney; ISSUES, Stockholm; Thomas Duncan Gallery, Los Angeles; Index Art Foundation; Carl Kostyál, Stockholm and SALTS, Basel. He was included in group exhibitions at Sadie Coles HQ, London; The Thielska Museum, Stockholm; Anonymous Gallery, New York; Sven Harry's Konstmuseum, Stockholm; Museo Capadimonte, Napels; Johan Berggren Gallery, Malmö; South London Gallery; Seventeen Gallery; as well as Rowing, London.

In 2021, Röhss received the Sten A Ohlsson Foundation for Research and Culture Visual Art Award.

His work is represented in collections such as Kistefos Collection, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Gullringsbo konstsamling and Stenastiftelsens konstsamling, to name but a few.



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Beautiful Soul, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 34.2×27.7×25 cm
 162.3×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Heart of Stone, Mind of Gold, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 30.5×27.7×23.5 cm
 158.5×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
High on Life, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 34.3×31.2×25.4 cm
 162.3×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Truth and Consequences, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 31.8×22.2×26.2 cm
 160×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Night Club Nurse, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 40.0×31.8×24.1 cm
 168×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Og Afro, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 44.5×23.8×30 cm
 172.3×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Venturi Effect, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 39.2×35.6×28 cm
 157.2×40×40 cm with podium



EMANUEL RÖHSS
Western Front, 2022
 Urethane resin, Magic Sculpt, acrylic
 & oil paint, LED light and plexiglass
 41.3×21×18.7 cm
 169.3×40×40 cm with podium

