

Gardar Eide Einarsson is this year's Festival Artist. Since Einarsson last exhibited at Bergen Kunsthall alongside Matias Faldbakken in 2004, he has positioned himself as one of Norway's most highly profiled contemporary artists. With "Versuchsstation des Weltuntergangs" he presents a major integrated exhibition consisting exclusively of new works. The exhibition is the sixtieth incarnation of the tradition-rich Festival Exhibition at Bergen Kunsthall.

In Einarsson's works we encounter an apparently impenetrable wall of coded messages and decontextualized visual signs taken from the history of art, popular culture and (often criminal) subcultures, enlarged or abstracted until they risk being emptied of their original meaning. The works are minimalistic, not only in their rigorous black-and-white execution, or in certain formal similarities to minimalism and geometrical abstraction in the history of art, but also in a calculated restraint which in some cases renders the works almost mute or non-communicative. Behind this surface, however, one finds a dense, intricate weave of many layers of information. The works are thus also impenetrable in a different way, in the sense of inexhaustible and rich in content. What at one level can be understood as cynical, cold and exclusive often also involves a sincerity and a penetrating humanist impulse.

Cue words such as negation, resistance and opposition sum up a recurring tone in Einarsson's sculptures, paintings, collages and photographs. In these investigations of various countercultural movements, oppositional phenomena and radical dissenters from the peripheral zones of our recent history, references range as freely to DIY hardcore punk or skater culture as to terrorists, dictators or mass murderers. The outlaw figure as a lawless dissident bears within it elements of both radical individualism and general resistance to the established order. The mythology of this figure can be found in art, in popular culture and among actual criminals, or in disadvantaged milieus in society.

For the past decade Einarsson's exhibition practice has followed a highly consistent thematic line. Each new exhibition can be seen as a new stage in an ongoing tracing of what could be called 'the iconography of resistance'. The signs and symbols that can be read out of Einarsson's works refer to fundamental conflictual structures between a society of control from the period after September 11 2001, and the individual's rebellion against and threat to central power. At the same time Einarsson refers to historical examples of tragic failed attempts to achieve such individual freedom. Popular culture's treatment of the outsider ideal often borrows its vocabulary of myths, signs and visuality from examples in reality where manifestations of extreme individualism have resulted in terrorism and crime. And so fiction and reality overflow into each other in a tightly woven fabric.

The visual language associated with the exercise of power and rebellion is also linked by Einarsson

with the art world of which he is himself a part, and which in many ways is also driven by a utopian (often also failed) impulse to resist. The avant-garde ideal and the notion of the artist as a totally emancipated individual run through the artistic history of modernism. Einarsson has deliberately and strategically chosen to work with this theme through art's own semiotic system, within the 'institutionalized' field of art, and with the self-referential formal language that constitutes the arena of contemporary art. In the same way as the culture of resistance to which he often refers, he also recognizes the field of art as a system that balances between communication and exclusion; where issues of style, the construction of mythology and real political conflict can all be played out at the same time.

The title of the exhibition is a quote from the Austrian journalist, essayist and satirist Karl Kraus (1879-1936). From an economically privileged position, and as part of the intellectual elite in Vienna at the close of the nineteenth century, Kraus launched an independent publishing enterprise with the periodical *Die Fackel* (The Torch) (1899-1936). In his consistently free journalism and unrelenting attacks on the power apparatus, corruption and established journalists, Kraus can perhaps be said to be an early example of the type of independent resistance figure with whom Einarsson often deals in his works. The quote refers to Kraus' description of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy (1867-1918) as a "laboratory for world destruction".

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