



Gaga, Los Angeles presents:

Josef Strau

The Prototype

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The first thing I wished to paint was an angel because it is the guardian above the bed of a child. It could be the first image they see, their first painting and eventually even their first view into an exterior imagination, into another world, or possibly behind.

So I wanted this imagined guardian to be the first image made for this exhibition and then see what will be “demanded” in the process as the next one, and hopefully more of the same image, hoping to having invoked a prototype by such an exercise and then to be following this prototype of the first angel in all the later works, presuming it as the prototype for all the images in the exhibition, still considering to having to develop one and the first exhibition painting and the first real baby painting too.

A prototype is in relation to serial production, but the series are still being made as the application of a certain craft, those serial originals might enhance the feeling of cinematic movement. The long and painful time spent within the rituals before the “birth” of the first image, the prototype, all this I tried many times before, but here I added and followed, although still little, some of the rules I have been learning recently from studying ages old scripts for the training of Russia’s mystical icon painters. I understood that somehow I was restricted by my rejection and fear of idolatry to use the typical byzantine painters subject matters with the necessary faith and intensity. But I found out during my own introspection that maybe I could develop such interior and necessary faith when projecting an angel and to my huge surprise, while looking up in the old icon school books I read, that it was the rule that in the second step of the training the scholar was asked to paint an angel and only later include other sacred persons or “objects”. It should be most natural to almost anyone to imagine the angel and to have faith in it, but as well to invoke one and as a result of such exercise to establish its helpful and inspiring presence for further works as an artist.

Though I realized the decision was not to try to make icons, or credulously assuming such a role model for myself too fast, but to, at the very least, be able to reproduce some sort of reminder or echo, triggering a memory of them, remembering and recounting the model of the really observant icon-painter who isn’t supposed to claim doing-icons for ones own benefit. The fear of doing idolatry and the fear of doing heresy was becoming a balancing-act.

I knew there is no original prototype in the creation of art, so after combing and searching very long through the infinite amount of internet angels I found the one in the multi winged angel made by Theophanes, generally one of the most incredible byzantine painters. He painted it in the 14th century in the very special and short timed country of the Republic of Novgorod, a free medieval state far in the

north of Russia. Theophanes himself referred to this prototype because it was the only image representation allowed in the First Temple in Jerusalem.

So at last I found the angel somehow, during production and through elaborate work times, strongly and almost entirely framed in the tin metal from contemporary Mexican icon painters. The metal appearance of the angels surrounding the soldered plane felt more and more like a reminder that the angels are contemporarily one of the most drawn subject matters in the entire world, particularly painted or tattooed by the many inflicted ones, by the prisoners, by people suffering incredible pains, or the ones feeling humiliated or feeling deeply abandoned and submitted to endless harsh and almost unpaid labor in all countries, those intensely seeking and praying for relief and for charity. Usually such depictions of the angels appear to be harsh and scary to the proud and educated ones, but paradoxically the harder they look the closer they are in fact to the true angelic spirit of charity. Once being given such an angelic license to paint them, it starts appearing while working on them, to be an incredibly great angelic mercy in itself to being permitted such a perfect labor.

Josef Strau (b. Vienna, 1957) is an artist living and working in New York City. Recent solo exhibitions include *Tears and New Tears*, Greene Naftali, NY; *Invitation Epiphany*, Kunsterhaus Bremen, Germany; *Loyalties*, Gaga Mexico City; *A Turtle Dreaming...Secession*, Vienna.