

STANDARD (OSLO) is proud to announce an exhibition of new works by Josh Smith with a title borrowed from a quote by Georgia O'Keefe.

There is the Beginning and there is the End, and then there is Death. He keeps on coming back in “The Seventh Seal” - ever since that first scene – arriving on the beach and stating the obvious: “I am Death”. All pale features. All black outfit. Leaving little for imagination. Leaving little sense of hope: “Nothing escapes me. No one escapes me.” Leaving you with few other options but to drag your feet, drag out time and drag out the next move in this chess game that you presumed was the best way of buying time.

Antonius Block: Wait a moment.

Death: You all say that. But I grant no reprieves.

Heavy handed, but there you have Ingmar Bergman, even though having rewritten the script five times had plenty of opportunities to rethink it. Black and white pieces played by people in black and white in a black and white film. The two dark, brooding silhouettes of Max von Sydow and Bengt Ekerot on either side of the chess game look the same (– come to think of it, Max von Sydow always looked the same). The cinematographer, Gunnar Fischer – having carried the 100 kilos heavy camera down to the beach to shoot the scene – remarked: “You can see that each of them has a 2 kg lamp behind him, illuminating his profile. People said to me that that has to mean that there are two suns. 'Yes. That's quite right,' I said. But if you can accept Death sitting playing a game of chess, then you can also accept two suns [...]”. Maybe it is more difficult to accept that Death would win now that Scandinavia has produced one of the finest champions the sport of chess ever saw with Magnus Carlsen. Sure, at some point Magnus Carlsen will die and at some point he might lose it. Not in a Bobby Fischer (no relation to Gunnar) sort of way of losing it, like losing grip on life, but just losing that touch that makes you win titles and tournaments. But up until then, who knows if Carlsen could not manage to escape.

“If you have the first move, the price of a mistake is much lower. So if you have the first move you can make a mistake and still be in the game”, Carlsen confesses. “If you’re playing black and you made a mistake you’re likely going to be out, just because of that half-move advantage.” Josh Smith likes to leave margins of error. Therefore he makes the opening move choosing motives that do not invite precision; a fish, a leaf, a skeleton, and this time around, the grim reaper. Thirteen of them, all equipped with that thankless task: being a messenger of bad news. Each one depicted in melancholic solitude suggesting as much sympathy with the messenger as with those receiving the message. And then, leaving the door a bit more open, Smith adds a bright coloured border at the edge of the

portrait. Stencilled onto that are pictograms of birds, flowers and other plants, disrupting the sense of drama that is becoming for Death. “Verfremdungseffekt”, if you ask Berthold Brecht. Or working with what you got, if you ask Gunnar Fischer, who for that final scene of “The Seventh Seal” where Death is dancing of with the travellers once again had to schlep that 100 kilos heavy camera to the beaches of Hovs Hallar. “We had packed up for the day because of an approaching storm. Suddenly I caught sight of a strange cloud. Gunnar Fischer hastily set the camera back into place. Several of the actors had already returned to where we were staying, so a few grips and a couple of tourists danced in their place, having no idea what it was all about.” The image that later became so iconic was improvised in only a few minutes. Sometimes it comes down to luck. Sometimes Death needs some help and some extras. Sometimes Magnus Carlsen loses in chess.

Josh Smith (b. 1976, Okinawa) grew up in Knoxville, Tennessee and lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions include: “*Josh Smith*” at Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, Germany (2016); “*Josh Smith*” at Museo d’Arte Contemporanea Roma, Rome, Italy (2015); “*The American Dream*” at the Brant Foundation Art Study Center, Greenwich, Connecticut (2011); and “*Hidden Darts*”, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, Austria (2008). Other exhibitions include “*ILLUMInations*” at the 2011 Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy; “*Le Printemps de Septembre*” in Toulouse, France; “*The Painting Factory: Abstraction after Warhol*” at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and “*The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World*” at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*