

Die Treppe Bildungszentrum (Die Treppe Educational Center) presents:

Verantwortung (Responsibility) – Melissa Absarah Torres & Rudolf Maeglin
15.11.2025 - 20.12.2025

The exhibition "Responsibility" brings together works by the young Swiss artist Melissa Absarah Torres (born 1994) and those of the Basel painter Rudolf Maeglin (1892–1971).

After completing his medical studies, Rudolf Maeglin worked as a laborer on construction sites and in the chemical industry alongside his artistic pursuits. He painted countless scenes from this milieu.

Melissa Absarah Torres, who grew up in an activist community, currently paints portraits of contemporary leaders (almost exclusively men) at important political and economic meetings with bold, direct brushstrokes. The skillfully painted figures are sometimes caricatured, lending them a tragicomic and surreal quality.

Social, socio-political, geopolitical, economic, and ecological conflicts have intensified dramatically, especially in recent years. It is surprising that these issues are rarely addressed in contemporary art. And when they are addressed, it happens mostly in a very subtle and indirect way. Surely there should be a pressing need to respond to current crises much more frequently, much more directly, and much more clearly. To comment on them, depict them, and put them up for discussion should be a much more frequent need.

This leads us to present the depictions of rulers and ruled by two artists whose birthdates are roughly 100 years apart, yet who face the same problems.

Information about the pictures of Melissa Absarah Torres:

Armistice, 2024

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm

In 2018, representatives from countries around the world were invited by the French government to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I. The heads of state sat on endless grandstands, forming a wall of those empowered to decide on the state of war or peace. Some figures were added later, such as Sunak, Meloni, and Orban, personalities who, like Trump, Putin, or Erdogan, were directly targeted by the event.

Macron warned that "the tragic course of history can return." He emphasized: "Patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism, namely its deception. Let us unite our hopes instead of opposing each other through our fears."

"Armistice" (French for ceasefire) stands for humanity's overwhelming desire for peace and the hope that statesmen will free themselves from their destructive greed.

Funeral, 2024

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm I

I days after Kamala Harris lost the presidential race, Trump and Obama were seen smiling at the funeral of Jimmy Carter. This image forces us to fight against conspiracy and fake news, to contextualize image-based situations from various perspectives and read them with our own critical mind. In an unelegant way, Barack was given the short straw by the other presidents: the place next to Trump. No one looked at him. Bush and Clinton's mild presence show how short-term their phase of popularity is and how the achievements and thwarted ambitions end up in the grave anyway. Biden is the last one of the era Carter is closing, the self-conscious one that had to acknowledge the global warming, all their counterparts long gone. He said to Trump to check whether he acts from hope or fear, ego or generosity and that the abuse of power is the greatest sin. The Rev. Andrew Young, who was with Martin Luther King Jr. when he was assassinated recalled how the ex-president began his century of life growing up in a mostly Black area of rural Georgia and had been a courageous advocate for racial equality in his home state and in the White House.

Summit, 2025

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm

G7 meeting of the seven most important "Western" countries. Tensions within Europe are high, but it was agreed that Trump must be persuaded to sign the communiqué (free, fair, and mutually beneficial trade, combating protectionism, with minimal demonstration of unity). Trump mocked the issue, arrived late, and left early to meet with Kim Jong-Un (North Korea) to discuss nuclear warfare. He ignored the climate and gender discussions, made jokes about the World Trade Organization, and demanded that Russia be allowed back into the group, even though it had been excluded due to its annexation of Crimea. In this picture, Merkel managed to convince Trump between discussions. But later, Trump did not sign the agreement after all, due to a mild remark by Trudeau. This was a decisive moment in America's departure from European values. A premonition of Trump's intention to support populists, not only to set himself apart, but to challenge and undermine democracy. The picture became a meme.

Peace, 2025

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm

July 2025, Netanyahu nominates Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize. What appears to be a satirical joke is another strategy of corruption and part of the war plan. While the West has long been content to comment on Trump's boorish manner rather than take the danger he poses seriously, warmongering, corrupt right-wingers understood much earlier how to use him. Trump's desire for a Nobel Prize is genuine and profound, as is his weakness for extreme flattery and distraction.

This benefited Netanyahu, as can be seen from the "ceasefire" deal for Gaza on October 10, the day the Nobel Prize was announced. Trump also claims to have resolved seven other extremely complex conflicts. Here, too, this tactic worked. The result: no ceasefire for Gaza, corrupt leaders remain in power, states fighting for their independence do not get it, new agreements on rare minerals in favor of "Western" states, and so on.

Death Hope Freedom, 2025

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm

On July 15, 2025, South Africa and Colombia called for an emergency conference on Gaza. Representatives

from Bolivia, Cuba, Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Malaysia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Oman, and South Africa announced sanctions against Israel to stop the flow of weapons that enable genocide and war crimes in Gaza. Gustavo Petro warned that Washington and NATO were not only bombing Gaza, but were well on their way to officially declaring war on democracy and human rights. The global majority (also known as the Third World) was the driving force behind the resistance to colonial expansion at the heart of the horror, breaking the global silence and advocating for the enforcement of international humanitarian law. The sanctions include: preventing military transport and the docking of military ships, no aid to Israel, reviewing contracts with institutions supporting Israel with public funds, accountability, justice for victims, and preventing future crimes. This moment marks a historic turning point and shows that public opinion is changing and concrete measures are being taken to weaken the genocide-based economy. It also calls on each individual to maintain hope as a discipline. Countries such as Spain, China, Mexico, Qatar, Brazil, and Turkey were represented.

Oppressive Honesty, 2025

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm

Another moment, as Japan which has historical and territorial disputes with South Korea and China accepted to open the door for closer ties amidst economic issues (Trump's taxes global destabilization tactic) and escalating global uncertainty. Japan and SK are traditionally aligned with Washington, and a collaboration with China would be really historical. The countries have bad honesty issues, Japan colonized Korea in the last century, banning Korean names and language, using the people as (sex) slaves and soldiers. When WW2 ended the brutalized country was separated into two and Japan still denies its behavior until this day. China is a regional threat, few months before the meeting, they sent an aircraft ship through Japanese islands and then tested missiles in the Pacific waters, Japan then sent a battleship to Taiwan, the strategic island in the US China face-off.

Ceasefire, 2025

Oil on cotton, 40 x 50 cm

August 2025 has seen the escalation of a very old conflict and multilayered. In the 15th century the Thai gradually separated themselves from the Khmer (Cambodian), creating the Siam kingdom that would end up dominating the region. The region has been in relationship with France since the 17th century and the French drew the line separating both countries at the beginning of the 20th century. Roughly speaking Thai politics followed capitalist democracy, while Khmer politics ended in a communist democracy that transformed into a civil war and genocide of their own population. The two countries come from the same origin, but have a lot of divergences that are used by the different kings, ministers and military leaders. In this case the official problem is the Dangrek genocide in 1979 when Thailand closed their borders fearing the overwhelming flow of refugees, and dramatically forced the already malnourished and sick over a mountain covered with landmines. The unofficial problem is the relationship between the actual prime ministers (although they're on another level of power), Hun Manet (Cambodia) known for being the son of his predecessor (thus the beginning of a new dynasty) and the controversial Thaksin Shinawatra, condemned for 8 years of prison for corruption and abuse of power, flying away several times (to Cambodia too) and ending up purging only one year, about the very prized (duty free) no-man's-land at the border. Acting as a peacekeeper is Malaysia, with their multiethnic and multicultural politics, a country with a stars and stripes flag, but with a Muslim crescent on it indicating Islam as main religion.

Information about Rudolf Maeglin:

Rudolf Maeglin (1892–1971) grew up in Basel in upper-middle-class circumstances. His mother came from a family of silk manufacturers, and his father was a wine merchant. Maeglin studied medicine and, after graduating, briefly worked as an assistant at the Geneva Cantonal Hospital before abandoning his medical career in 1919 to become an artist.

After stays in Italy and Paris, he returned to Basel in 1927. He worked as a laborer in industry and on construction sites, primarily painting scenes from this environment. In 1933, he was a founding member of the anti-conservative, anti-fascist Basel artists' association "Gruppe 33." He made no secret of his anti-bourgeois stance. From 1947 onward, he lived in a small studio house in Basel-Kleinhüningen, a working-class neighborhood. It is important to remember that he was free to choose this life.

Thus, his paintings are also free of militant ideology or socialist propaganda. Despite artistic and stylistic flourishes, his paintings remain authentic and unassuming.

After his death in 1971, Rudolf Maeglin was virtually forgotten by the art world, undoubtedly due in part to the highly original nature of his work. Only in recent years has he begun to receive renewed attention.