

Produced on site at the Kölner Kunstverein over the course of two months, Julien Ceccaldi's *Solito* is a large-scale exhibition in which a fairy tale unfolds around a character of the same name, a concupiscent and boyish 30-year-old virgin willing to give himself to anybody. The plot is inspired by stories such as "Beauty and the Beast", "Bluebeard", and "The Nutcracker and the Mouse King", in which the female protagonists end up in love with ugly men, and sexuality manifests itself through power and violence. However, all *Solito* gets out of his unsightly, quickly aborted love story, is a fading souvenir of happiness.

Misery is all the more evident in the comic book published by Ceccaldi for this exhibition. In what could be interpreted as a dream of his own doing, the titular character goes so far as to make advances to death itself. He follows Oscar, a soldier from a magical land who is nothing more than "a cadaver, an empty shell [he] projects on" (J. Ceccaldi). *Solito* is presented as ambivalent: Desperate for partnership and security, he also acts masochistically in that he orchestrates a self-fulfilling destiny of being forever rejected. He plays with the dead like one does with dolls, and dreams of an eternal tea party with skeletons, all the while unconsciously wishing they would turn on him. Betraying their trust ultimately gets him thrown back onto the cold sidewalk of the real world – an allusion to "The Little Match Girl" by Hans-Christian Andersen, one of the most prominent fairy tale writers.

Ceccaldi took descriptions of the author's life as a template for *Solito*'s character traits. Andersen never engaged in sexual relations with women nor men, indulging in intense masturbation after each encounter instead. Described as childish and love-obsessed in equal measures, he was considered an outsider and a loner within the Copenhagen elite of the 19th century, and he died alone at the end of his days. His original tales were perverse and morbid; his suffering heroines often dying a painful death. Later adaptations of his more tragic stories have been rewritten with a happy ending.

Further aesthetic and conceptual references can be found in the animation TV-series "Revolutionary Girl Utena" (1997) by Kunihiko Ikuhara, and the manga "The Rose of Versailles" (1972) and "Oniisama E" (1975) by Riyoko Ikeda, which weave together fairytale symbols, androgyny, and inescapable fates along with modern backdrops and contemporary preoccupations. The exhibition also borrows from these works the liberty to blend myths from different places across history from the Middle Ages, to 19th century Europe and our present time.

These different starting points establish the framework for the figures and setting in *Solito*, which are transferred onto various surfaces both inside and outside the exhibition spaces: animated video loops, sculptures, digital drawings, and paintings on plastic. The works no longer follow a consistently linear narrative as on the pages of the book. Inspired by cel art, a technique used in animation to separate backgrounds from foregrounds, images of different moods manifest themselves through overlays, off-sets, and trompe l'œil effects. They circulate around the figure of *Solito*, with whom visitors get closer to as they walk through the exhibition hall. Like the

fragmented pieces that come together to form identity itself, repeated variations of the same figure elicit feelings of vanity and confinement, but also moments of emancipatory liberation.

Julien Ceccaldi created the comic book *Solito* especially for the exhibition [36 pages, edited by Nikola Dietrich, September 2018]. It can be purchased at a price of €12 (members €8).

Julien Ceccaldi was born in 1987 in Montreal, Canada and lives in New York. Solo exhibitions include *Gay*, Lomex, New York, NY (2017); and *King and Slave*, Jenny's, Los Angeles, CA. He has recently participated in group exhibitions such as *Painting Now and Forever 3*, Greene Naftali, New York, NY; *An Assembly of Shapes*, Oakville Galleries, Ontario, Canada; and *The Present in Drag*, 9th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, Berlin.

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