

WHO AM I

Tang Contemporary Art and KÖNIG GALERIE are pleased to present “WHO AM I”, a group show with artists represented by Berlin-based KÖNIG GALERIE, taking place at Tang Contemporary Art’s 1st Gallery Space in Beijing.

The show includes works by internationally acclaimed artists Kathryn Andrews, Norbert Bisky, Peter Dreher, Elmgreen & Dragset, Jeppe Hein, Karl Horst Hödicke, Alicja Kwade, John Seal, Rinus Van de Velde, Matthias Weischer, Erwin Wurm and Lí Wei.

At the center of the exhibition stands the human figure, symbols of life, vanitas and death. The theme of death is probably most visibly represented by Elmgreen & Dragset’s “Reversed Crucifix” that transforms the iconic image of the suffering Christ into that of an ordinary man, whose body, tied to the cross, even evokes sexual notions of bondage and submissive play. The motive of crucifixion is also used by Karl Horst Hödicke in his painting from 1985. The picture hides the person’s body only evoking the religious notion through the characteristic nails through the hand and the violent stream of blood running from it. Just as in Elmgreen & Dragset’s work the arm could belong to anyone, therefore posing the question of human mortality. The universal question of eternal life and life after death is even more explicitly stated by Jeppe Hein’s “WHO AM I WHY AM I WHERE AM I GOING”, a neonbox which surface reflects the viewer so that in facing these questions they also have to face themselves. John Seal seemingly proposes images of bucolic visions of afterlife, but his pictures simultaneously transport motives of the classic vanitas still life, making the fruits look too perfect to be true and therefore exposing them as pure fantasy. The idea of vanitas and the passing of time is urgently present in Peter Dreher’s series of silver bowls which he continuously painted one a day. While seemingly always returning to the same motive, the changes become apparent in differences in lighting and the reflections on the bowls. While freezing one moment Dreher concurrently shows how nothing can stay the same.

The conceptual starting point for Norbert Bisky’s large-scale painting “Big Trilemma” is the motif of the threefold dead-end conflict situation, focusing on the intractability in modern society showing destruction, violence and chaos. The dynamic compositions feature a complex network of references that feed from current events and thus compose snapshots of our world, which seems to have gone out of joint.

Kathryn Andrews uses iconic images such as that of Sun Maid, a popular American raisin brand, which are already firmly established in the (American) visual memory but reduces them back to their most basic features, thereby depriving them of all their lively elements. By pairing them with the realistic images of fruits she questions notions of women’s fertility and representation. Erwin Wurm abstracts human features even more by creating a dancing sausage, equipped with arms and legs which diminish every day human actions into comic activities.

Known for sculptural installations that disrupt viewers’ perception of time and space as fixed organising systems, Alicja Kwade draws from physics and philosophy to create works that test the limits of the known. Shift Slot (Tree), 2018, explores the themes of nature and growth and the nature’s systems, featuring bronze cast branches and roots that sprout from a copper tree trunk. The tree is systematically divided into eight parts, disrupting its logical and natural order.

Rinus Van de Velde as well as Matthias Weischer explore human living spaces in their work. Weischer creates seemingly trivial images of interior spaces who serve as mirrors of human conditions, as one’s own personal space inevitably reveals insights into its inhabitant’s inner life. Rinus Van de Velde’s drawing is inspired by the comic series “The Adventures of Tintin” but transferred in his own realm as it supposedly depicts the alley behind his studio where the artist’s alter ego is kidnapped by a collector. The setting turns out to be that of a movie exposing the narrative character of Van de Velde’s works.

Lí Wei’s *Once upon a time* presents six world well known people in their childhood period. They are around the age of five to six, hanging out together like ordinary children. Those kids have already had tremendous impact on the world. Yet Lí Wei wants to imagine a moment back in time when they were still raw potential. Lí Wei seized the impressionable period of human life, froze them into one hypothetical shared space in time, and gave them toys. A return to a ‘blank slate’ state: Toys are the initial resources for children to understand the world.