

KATZ CONTEMPORARY

URS LÜTHI
ART IS THE BETTER LIFE

19 March - 7 May 2016

Artist Talk with Tobia Bezzola
Friday, 22 April 2016, 7 pm

KATZ CONTEMPORARY is delighted to present **Urs Lüthi's** (*1947 in Krienz, Switzerland, lives and works in Munich, Germany) first solo exhibition at the gallery. The exhibition features older as well as more recent work which is all rooted in Lüthi's experience and the quintessence that he has drawn from his life and his artistic path so far: *ART IS THE BETTER LIFE*. Some of the pieces will be presented for the first time, others for the first time in Switzerland.

Lüthi's oeuvre almost seems to defy any categorization but then again shows an incredible coherence – there are numerous series, many of which Lüthi has picked up again and again up to the present day; the media that he works with such as photography, sculpture, video and performance among others is almost as extensive - and then there are also his earlier photographic works from the 1970ies (such as *Lüthi weint auch für Sie*, 1970) which have since become icons. The artist himself recounts that there were times when nobody was interested in a Lüthi that had no Lüthi on it. He had involuntarily become his own very successful label that quickly began to bore him. Lüthi refuses to provide the viewer with reliable traits and thus resists to be branded in a certain way. On the contrary, through his works he wants to accomplish that you question yourself and your own position as the viewer. He agrees with Picabia's saying: „The head is round so the way of thinking can change directions.“ Thus the artist later indeed starts labeling his works - with his own profile which gives the pieces in his series *ART FOR A BETTER LIFE* a corporate identity from that point on. Does Lüthi now give to the world what it has wanted all along or is what is happening exactly what the artist wants? Either way, the viewer cannot avoid questioning his or her own attitude and expectation.

However, his more recent works clearly show that Lüthi's earlier work, too, is more than a series of narcissistic displays of his own youthful and beautiful self. In them, Lüthi winks his eyes at us from the treadmill while giving advice on how to live a fulfilled life. That is when we know that he tricked us once again (*Run for your Life* and *Therapies* from the series *Placebos & Surrogates*). Lüthi chose the self-portrait as his mode of representation because he realized that there can be no universal truth, instead he was only able to oppose this societal reality with his own subjective awareness and experience. Or as Lüthi says: "(...) I can only tell about the world as I see it through myself, since I am the only filter through which I tell my truths.

In addition to photographic works the exhibition also includes three-dimensional sculptural pieces. In *Lost Direction II* we find the artist cast in aluminum. His extremities have been cut and pieced together again in an unnatural way as though the single body pieces have completely lost their direction. Simultaneously, the sculptures are placed on high pedestals, giving them a sublime aura while also provoking a smile. Under the title *Ex Voto II* (from the series *ART IS THE BETTER LIFE*) delicate pieces of glass that at the same time seem

medicinal and prosaic are presented in display cabinets. The artist's head is sitting fixedly on top of glass tubes that are reminiscent of heart vessels while lying rather uncomfortably and fragile on the cold cabinet floor. An "ex voto", latin for "because of a vow" stands for an object which is offered at a place of worship as a symbolic sacrifice for the rescue from an emergency situation. The religious nature of the scene is heightened by the physical elevation of the pieces and their presentation in a glass cabinet.

In Lüthi's latest work *Brachland/Wasteland* (2014) a black-and-white self-portrait of the artist with flies faces a wooden stool with a copper plate doused in a relief-like grey paint. The grey stripes that cross the image make it look like a still from security camera footage. Like in a scene from a Dutch still life, the flies are populating Lüthi's face as if it were an overly ripe fruit - a vanitas motif that is reinforced by its appearance as a video still. The copper plate in particular symbolizes the wasteland (land that was once inhabited or used but was subsequently abandoned and still bears traces of a former human presence) that, like the human face, shows the course of time and the traces of life, which define human beings and alter landscapes.

Every piece in itself as well as the works in their entirety seem to reinforce Lüthi's dictum *ART IS THE BETTER LIFE*. Then again, art and life are two separate worlds: We live in one and can project ourselves into the other through art. Everyone's longing brings those two worlds closer to each other again. The bittersweet sense of longing, however, can only exist as long as it remains unfulfilled. The artist has of course understood this a long time ago and maybe the thought is so comforting precisely because we never know whether art would indeed be the better life - we only know that it would be different, that is certain.

Stefanie Bissig

For visual material and further information please contact the gallery:
Tel: +41 44 212 22 00 / info@katzcontemporary.com

PREVIEW

Stéphane Zaech

beau monde

3 June - 30 July 2016

Opening: 2 June 2016