

freymond- guth Ltd. fine ARTS

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Tue – Fri 11 – 18h
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Or by appointment

MARC BAUER

EMPEROR ME

28 November 2015 – 16 January 2016

Opening 27 November, 18hrs

The title of Marc Bauer's latest series of drawings is taken from a tradename for an industrial glove, the EMPEROR ME108 Heavyweight, produced by Marigold Industrial. The inspiration for the drawings, by contrast, is rather more sentimental: the two-hundred-year-old amorous correspondence, written in French and only recently published, between Johannes von Müller, custodian of the Imperial Library of Vienna, and a younger man of his acquaintance posing in the letters as a 'Hungarian count', with the plausibly unpronounceable name of Louis Batthyány Szent-Iványi. What do these startling opposites—the 'Emperor of hand protection for industrial use' and a historical case of aristocratic fraud at the dawn of the Austrian Empire—have in common? One would think very little. But in Marc Bauer's hands they represent power, absence, and the objectification of love and desire.

The drawings feature fetishized articles of clothing: a latex glove, a leather Chap, a shirt. These objects are isolated and alienated from their original function. They are even, one could say, alienated from their secondary function as fetish-wear. (For seen without a human leg, it is initially hard to recognize the Chap for what it is.) It is very unlikely that the glove, the 'emperor' of the series, has ever been put to 'industrial use'. The manufacturers state its possible applications as being in 'the chemical industries, fishing, agriculture, mining'. But this is an art gallery, not a pig-shed, and the majority of present viewers are probably more familiar with its ulterior use in the practice—or rather, at least, the dark signification of the practice—of fisting. In this regard, Bauer's choice of subject might be called camp. He invites us to understand these objects through a shared, ironizing code. He suggests sex, or at least, a certain type of sex. But there is nothing camp about these images. There is nothing camp about their rendering—which is anything but playful—nor their meaning, which is about the signification of love in general, not just in secret between a certain type of men.

The gloves, the sleeves, the strangely rigid leg-covering should be inanimate objects. But somehow they are not. Larger-than-life and viewed from the same perspective, they seem to resonate with the memory of their wearer. They are more than clothing. They are like the dead skin shed by their wearers, the remnants of... affection? desire? submission? One is almost tempted to read a narrative into them, as markers that symbolize different stages in a relationship or affair. In this they are similar to the quotes from the letters transcribed in the portfolio. The artist has taken each quote from a different letter. Each quote captures a different point in the unusual story of love and betrayal in early 19th-century Vienna. They plot a descent from sentimental (frankly naïve) ardour, to betrayal, then melancholy and shame. The letters are fragments of desire, just as the objects in the drawings are. Marc Bauer seems to suggest that we can only desire or love a person in fragments, that we can only ever grasp a person in fragments, in snippets of sentiment, and that for desire or love to exist it must persist in the person's absence, through objects they have touched. From these fragments of longing—letters, slowly dying flowers, a crushed shirt—one construes a love affair; in the drawings it is a modern one, in the letters it is historical.

The correspondence traces a love story between an esteemed Swiss-born scholar (Müller) and a Swiss-born swindler (Hartenberg), posing as a count. Müller's infatuation was entirely lived out in his imagination. He never met the 'count'. It was love experienced as the acute presence of another's absence, just as the glove's form is very literally a presence in absence. The 'count's' letters were written to instil desire not just through their words, but through the very paper on which they were written. For in 1802, when the correspondence began, letters were, we can safely assume, one of the most commonly fetishized objects. A letter sometimes bore the loved one's scent and always bore the loved one's touch, the imprint of a hand, the perspiration of the writer's fingers. Before typewriters, stenography, and email, letters were objects that signified, among other things, the absence of the writer combined with the presence of the reader in his or her mind. Letters were always written by hand and read while held in the hand. The glove, obviously, is also all about the hand, and the sleeve ends in a hand. The artist repeatedly emphasises the hand, objectifies it, because he wants to evoke the sense of touch and contrast this with the absence of the loved one's touch that lingers only on these lifeless things and, through them, in the mind.

The ribbons, another ironic, historicizing gesture, are also there to tempt our sense of touch and remind us that in a drawing, unlike in a sculpture or painting, if we reach out and touch, there is nothing to feel but paper. But in his rendering of the glove and the sleeve, Bauer also draws attention to his own hand. For these are drawings. They are the graphic legacy of the movements of a hand. Bauer even references the 'graphic legacy' of the art of drawing—by drawing, with clear affection, the folds of the sleeve, in memory of the wearer, perhaps, but also in (unconscious?) memory of the motif of drapery in the graphic arts, the fondness—no, the obsession—of artists as long ago as Schongauer and Dürer to draw folds as a way to show off their skill and freeze time in the prolonged moment of their gaze. For elaborate folds only occur through movement, but, like the bouquet of flowers—a still life—they can only be truly seen when the subject stands unnaturally still, 'plays dead' as it were, so that he or she and the clothes he or she is wearing can live on in a work of art—just as a fictitious love affair, once exposed, once dead, only lives on in letters.

By Lance Anderson, Berlin

For further information and images, please contact the gallery at:
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MARC BAUER (*1975, Geneva, CH) lives in Berlin, DE and Zurich (CH)

Recent exhibitions and projects include (s = solo exhibition)

2015 Aaaahhh! Paris Internationale, Paris, FR (s), Deweer Gallery, Otegem, BE (s)
Cinerama, FRAC Paca, Marseille, FR (s) Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (S.M.A.K.), Ghent, BE
Kunsthau Zurich, CH, Drawing Room, London, UK, Albertina, Vienna, AT cTriennial of contemporary Kunstverein Speyer, Speyer, DE, Musée Rath, Geneva, CH
Kunstverein Konstanz, DE,

2014 FRAC Alsace, Sélestat, FR (s), Museum Folkwang, Essen, DE (s), FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, FR (s), Le quartier, Quimper, FR (s), Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, CH Aargauer Kunsthau, Aarau, CH, Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool, GB

2013 Freymond-Guth Fine Arts, Zurich, CH (s), Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris, FR (s), Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR, Parcours, Art Basel, CH FRAC Auvergne, Clermont-Ferrand, FR

2012 La Station, Nice, FR (s), Musée de Pully, with Sara Masüger, Lausanne, CH (s), Kunsthau Baselland, Basel, CH (s), Villa Bernasconi, Geneva, CH, Palais de la Bourse, Paris, FR, Kunsthalle Exnergasse, Wien, AT

2010-11 Totstell-Reflexe, parts in cooperation with Christine Abbt, Kunstmuseum St. Gallen, CH (s) Centre d'Art du Hangar à Bananas, Nantes, FR, Beirut Art Center, RL, Centre Pompidou, Paris, FR
RAL 7021, eine magnifique Reportage!, Barbara Seiler Galerie, Zurich, CH, Kunstmuseums Solothurn, CH, Museum Ostwall, Dortmund, DE