

History's Many Fathers

Austrian artist Philip Mueller returns to Carbon 12 for the second of a three-part series of exhibitions, *My Father Was Many* and *I Am Happy as a Sailor*, his current show at the Dubai gallery.



Philip Mueller's works deal with history's forefathers, the search for his ancestors and simultaneously attempt to define humanity. For the 25 year-old artist, "[humanity] is the way we deal with our past. It can also be the people that we vilify or admire and commend throughout our lives and even history." His latest body of work, created over the past five years, include pieces that reveal a free-style technique of painting that are colossal. "Although the majority of my works are paintings, what I do is collage-based," explains Mueller, "there are many layers of ideas, models and imagination that go into all of my works." The first of two exhibitions by Mueller at Carbon 12, this show comprises 36 multimedia pieces, along with a 100-page book that documents the artist's last five months of practice.

My Father Was Many and *I am Happy as a Sailor* poses questions that tackle direction, the future and an eternal search. These issues equally apply to the topic of art as well as an overall philosophical contemplation on life. Mueller, who returns to Dubai two years after *Eat When You Can, Sleep When You Can* - his first solo at Carbon 12 - engages viewers in a process of introspection. "I see [my work] as a kind of alchemistic examination," says the Austrian artist, who has participated in three group shows at Carbon 12 since 2008. "I put things together and take things apart then attempt to create something new and different." Canvas meets with the artist and discusses his most recent body of work.

How did you arrive at the title's show and what is its significance?

The exhibition is about our schizophrenic handling of our past, our heroes or our antiheroes and what legacy or notorious tales they have passed down to us. I think that the past has left us with baggage and in order for us to move forward, we must try to get past the baggage that we were left with.

What characterises your work?

Every work develops its own personality. Sometimes my work is dark and other times it is more light and free. Even in a series, each painting is a composition of different moments. My paintings paint themselves.

Your work has a graffiti/urban feel to it. What are your thoughts on this?

Everything is incorporated in my paintings, even feelings and tastes. In every metropolis you will find impressive street art and sometimes we do not even realise that graffiti is a mode of art; it's also the oldest way of communication across generations. For me, this influence is very important because it's a direct form of expression. My style is partly rooted in that kind of expression but also deconstructs and layers it with a sort of romantic, realistic aspect.

By going through history and looking back at "humanity" do you also try to incorporate certain artistic techniques from specific eras?

Of course - I work with different techniques and styles because I can and I am free enough to do that. I am conflicted though: half of my approach is attempting to abandon or overcome certain styles, techniques or traditions, while my other half tries to appropriate them.

What emotion or response do you hope to evoke from the viewer?

Whatever the emotion is, be it enlightened, afraid or disturbed, I want it to be intense. It is not important that the viewer interprets my works the correct way; I just want to evoke a strong connection or emotion.

What work from this exhibition would you say is a highlight?

The book definitely has to be my favourite piece as it is a documentation of five intense months of work. I love it.

At just 25 years old, you have managed to develop a distinct style and a thorough body of work. How was your style evolved so far?

I don't think my style will ever stop evolving, even fine nuances require constant examination. Due to the fact that I developed my own style at an early age, I will have more time to see it evolve.

What are your future plans, and where do you envision your career heading?

I just want to paint.

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