

Exhibition File

Josef Felix Müller
Neue Bilder, Eiswasser und Spiegelung
3 May - 21 June 2009

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Swiss artist Josef Felix Müller was first presented at DEWEER gallery in 1985. The following shows in 1987, 1990 and 1994 showed various aspects of his sculptural practice. The show 'Farbe für das Volk' in 1999 was a decisive moment in Müller's shift towards painting: especially for DEWEER gallery the artist made a wonderful series of 120 small figurative sculptures, each one of which was given a layer of paint of a different colour on the front side of the base. And the show with the 8 paintings from the Alpenbilder series in 2002 was a pure painting show. With the present show Neue Bilder, Eiswasser und Spiegelung, we present Müller's most recent paintings.

Müller starts working towards the end of the seventies and makes very large, neo-expressionist paintings about controversial themes such as mutilation, homosexuality, sexuality between human beings and animals, etc. The canvasses provoke a scandal and make him famous in very short time. At the beginning of the eighties, he promptly changes medium and begins to create equally big neo-expressionist sculptures in wood. He makes figurative statues, often painted, preferably in red. It was then that the artist stated that cutting wood is like cutting flesh.

Almost 20 years later, around the turn of the century, Josef Felix Müller's artistic focus shifts from man to nature. As a logical consequence, he ceases to make sculptures and takes on painting again. From now on, he concentrates on a painterly reconstruction of nature. He regards earth as one big body, which can be inhabited and explored and which is many times bigger than mankind.

In 2000, Müller begins to paint the mountains. About the resulting series of paintings, made between 2000 and 2002 and entitled 'Alpenbilder', he says: "In fact I have always drawn, painted and sculpted. During my figurative period, sculpture was the right medium for me. This way of working – to cut figures directly out of the wood with the chainsaw – accorded with the theme of human vulnerability. As for the mountains, it was clear to me that they had to be painted, (...) mountains are gigantic sculptures."

After the series of Alpenbilder, Müller made series about the forest (Waldstücke, 2003-2006), about sources and ponds (Quelle, 2004-2007), about the roof of foliage in the forest (Lichträume, 2005-2007) and about rivers and brooklets during wintertime (Eiswasser).

For his paintings of mountains and gletschers, Müller chose pictures made by others. He selected photographs from books, each taken from an airplane. For his later series, he turned to digital photography. During long hiking tours he photographs natural scenes, only a few of which are selected to serve as the basis for a painting. A print on A4 size is enlarged up to 10 times and copied onto the canvas. The resulting drawing is then being painted over.

Josef Felix Müller's canvasses are special in many ways, of which three are to be mentioned here. First, there is his very conscious and conceptual way of dealing with time. Out of a click of the camera, which lasts a couple of milliseconds – he creates a large painting that requires months of painstaking work. It is a choice to slow things down based on artistic motivations, but also on social and ecological ones.

Second, Müller is very important for our visual perception of the world and of the work of art. From a distance, his canvasses can be read as photorealistic images, but if we look more closely all we see is paint and an abstract composition.

The pattern of the painted surface gets a hold of our gaze and fascinates us so much that we are inclined to recognise all kinds of fairy-tale motives, imagery that has nothing to do with the painting's intentions.

Third, Müller seems to distance himself from contemporary art practices and from art history, in which many artists have dealt with the landscape before him, using all kinds of media. But with his own very personal and original way of looking at things, Müller definitely adds a chapter to the history of the genre.

Biography

Josef Felix Müller was born in 1955 in Eggersriet, Switzerland, and lives and works in the Swiss city of Sankt Gallen. Müller had solo shows in a.o. Neue Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen (2006), Ausstellungshalle Kraft Basel (2000), Kunstmuseum Chur (1997), Kunsthalle Giessen (1996), Museum zu Allerheiligen Schaffhausen (1995), Kunstverein Frankfurt (1993), Kunsthalle Bielefeld (1991), Museum Moderner Kunst Wien (1987), Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, Neue Galerie Sammlung Ludwig Aachen (both in 1985) and Kunsthaus Zürich (1983). An early painting by Josef Felix Müller is part of the collection of S.M.A.K. in Ghent, Belgium.

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exhibition views / works





Spiegelung, 2007-2008





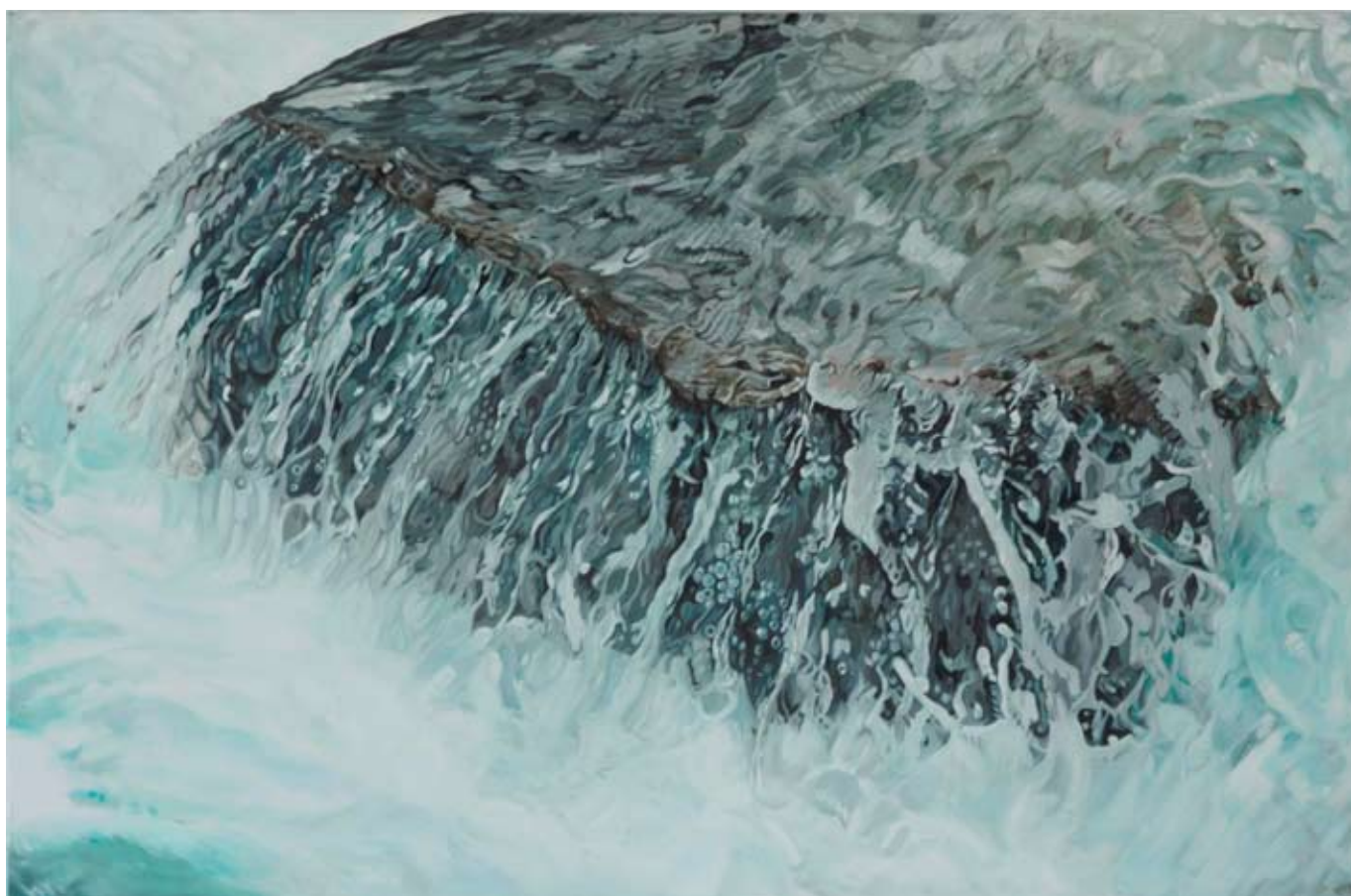
Lichträume I, 2007





right: Eiswasser II, 2008, oil on canvas, 135 x 202 x 3 cm
left: Eiswasser IV, 2009, oil on canvas, 135 x 202 x 3 cm





clockwise:
Eiswasser II, 2009, Eiswasser I, 2008, Eiswasser III, 2009, Eiswasser IV, 2009





Quelle X, 2007

List of works

Spiegelung, 2007-2008, oil on canvas, triptych, 200 x 900 cm

Eiswasser I, 2008, oil on canvas, 135 x 202 x 3 cm

Eiswasser IV, 2009, oil on canvas, 135 x 202 x 3 cm

Eiswasser II, 2009, oil on canvas, 135 x 202 x 3 cm

Quelle X, 2007, oil on canvas, 135 x 185 x 3 cm

Lichträume I, 2007, oil on canvas, 135 x 185 x 3 cm

Lichträume IX, 2007, oil on canvas, 135 x 185 x 3 cm

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DEWEER gallery | 3 May - 21 June 2009 (until 10 July by appointment only)

Opening hours Wednesday - Friday / Sunday 14:00-18:00, and by appointment (closed on 21, 22 and 31 May)

Road description On E17 (Antwerpen - Kortrijk) take exit 4 (N36), direction Ronse - after 7 kms, past the Gulf gasstation, take first right, direction Avelgem - after 1,5 kms: gallery on the left side

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