

## ART CITIES: Zurich / Uwe Wittwer

Since the beginning of his career in the middle of the eighties, Uwe Wittwer's works have been questioning the truth behind images and visual representation. His oeuvre encompasses paintings, water colours, charcoal drawings, works on paper and sculptural works on glass. Through his works, Wittwer takes the viewer to poetical and dreamlike, picturesque worlds of the unknown.

By Efi Michalarou

Photo: Galerie Peter Kilchmann Archive



The new group of works by Uwe Wittwer that are on show in his solo exhibition "Holzfäller.Spiegel", interweave historical and fictional subjects with autobiographical elements from the artist's life, forming a web of cultural references around collective and personal memory. In addition to several paintings in oil on canvas and large-scale charcoal drawings on paper, a series of sculptural paint on glass works will be on display, a technique which marks a new departure in Wittwer's extensive oeuvre. Also a novelty is a monumental wall drawing spanning across three walls of the large exhibition space. In the center of the room, one encounters five free-standing stained

glass windows. In their irregular arrangement, they form a kind of hall of mirrors through which the viewer can move freely. The paintings on the glasses were handcrafted traditionally and carefully by Wittwer at the Mayer's Court Art Institute for Glass Painting and Mosaic) in Munich, founded in 1847. The individual glasses refer to key motifs that are taken up in different ways in the exhibition, such as "Waste Land. Fragment 2". In direct association with the large mural, it allows the viewer to reflect on a central verse from the aforementioned poem. The transparent glass, which is not painted over the entire surface, allows the sparse landscape of trees in the background to shine



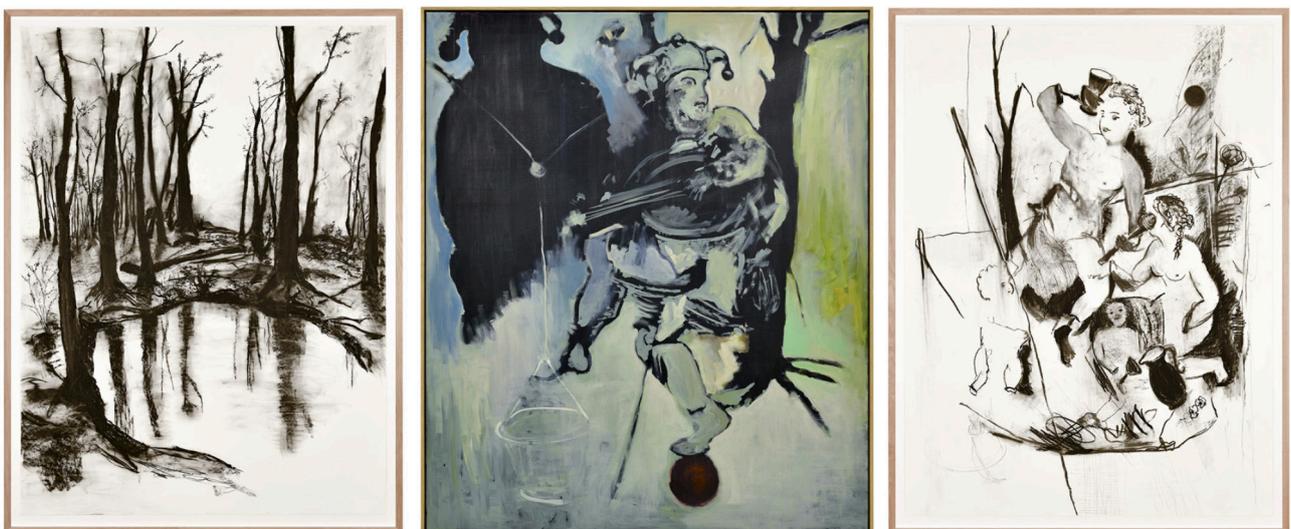
## MONICA DE CARDENAS

through occasionally, creeping into the glass like a quiet shadow, and meeting with the reflection of the viewer simultaneously. The motifs for “Selbstportrait”, “Braumeisterhaus” and “Im Walde” are taken from the photo albums of the artist’s parents and grandparents and offer an intimate insight into his family history of three generations. While “Selbstportrait” shows a young, already adult Wittwer, “Braumeisterhaus” depicts his great-grandfather’s house in Aargau. “Im Walde” depicts a scene deriving from Wittwer’s childhood, also to be found in the diptych “Holzfäller. Spiegel” in the second exhibition room, which plays an eponymous role for the exhibition title.

The right canvas of the diptych shows Wittwer’s father chopping wood in the forest. Wittwer himself stands by as a young boy and observes the scene. A forest landscape, denser and lusher than the mural, refers to Romanticism artists such as Caspar David Friedrich, while the woodcutting scene explicitly echoes a painting by Ferdinand Hodler. However, it is not the vigorous motion of the lumberjack figure that interests Wittwer, but rather its symbolic ambivalence. The monochrome colors, shades of blue, and omissions of color in the figures and the trees appear like a photographic template turned into a negative. The left side of the diptych shows



Left: Uwe Wittwer, *Im Walde (In the Woods)*, 2020, glass, painted and burned, painted metal stand, 200 x 150 cm, (recto, painted side)  
 Center: Uwe Wittwer, *Wandstück (Wallpiece)*, 2020, oil on canvas, 82 x 72 cm, framed  
 Right: Uwe Wittwer, *Schatten über Schatten (Shadows over Shadows)*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 192 x 145 cm, framed,  
 © Uwe Wittwer, Courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann



Left: Uwe Wittwer, *äldchen (Copse)*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 192 x 145 cm, framed  
 Center: Uwe Wittwer, *Gaukler mit Schatten (Fool with Shadow)*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 132.5 x 112.5 cm (52 1/8 x 44 1/4 in.), framed  
 Right: Uwe Wittwer, *Trauriger Bacchus (Sad Bacchus)*, 2020, Charcoal on paper, 192 x 145 cm, framed  
 © Uwe Wittwer, Courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann



Uwe Wittwer, *Im Wäldchen nach Poussin (Into the woods after Poussin)*, 2020, charcoal on paper, 191.5 x 261 cm, framed  
© Uwe Wittwer, Courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann

details of the scene as if in a mirror, but the focus lies solely on the axe and the trees. The two figures are absent. Both canvases are primed with black paint, and the motif is painted into the bright, luminous areas. In recent years, Wittwer's choice of media focussed on large-format watercolors in addition to oil painting. Now, with his charcoal drawings, he turns to a technique that had already accompanied him early on in his artistic work and then fell into oblivion for a long time. As with the glass paintings, the drawn subject is stripped from all color, allowing the individual scenes to be perceived without the visual power of the hues charged with associations. Instead of fluid color gradients, deep black outlines and expressive hatching take their place, charging the motif with a whole new emotionality. The contrast between hard contours and shadowy, softly drawn sections, as in "Schatten über Schatten", which is inspired by a still from the film "Nostalgia" (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1983), shows the multifaceted potential

of the technique, which at times takes on a painterly quality. The exhibition ends in the gallery's small, intimate and cabinet like project space, which is dedicated to the large-format charcoal drawing "Im Wäldchen nach Poussin". Inspired by Poussin's group of figures of the Triumph of Bacchus (ca. 1640), Wittwer transfers the Old Master model into a forest devastated by battle. Contrary to the innocent title of the work, Wittwer here draws a clear reference to the famous Battle of the Ardennes of 1944. As if in a harmonious cycle, the viewer encounters the fragility of the idyll in this final space, which runs like a thread through Wittwer's work and finds its equivalent here in an atmospherically charged charcoal drawing of fascinating beauty.

*Photo: Uwe Wittwer, Stilleben nach Fantin Latour (Still Life after Fantin Latour)*, 2020, Oil on canvas, 42 x 52 cm (16 1/2 x 20 1/2 in.), framed, © Uwe Wittwer, Courtesy the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann