

Robert Estermann & Oz Oderbolz

Opening: 17.03.23 at 18:00
17.03.23 – 13.05.23

The art of Estermann and Oderbolz is preoccupied with trespassing and entering that boundary-breaking space which permits freedom, untame cravings, and observes the wilder sides of human nature. In a remarkable tension, this exhibition will look at topics such as the history of the human rider, the anti-hero, fetish, masculinity and ambivalence amongst other things. Through their different uses of subcultural expressions, staging, caricature and the sleekness of styling, they reshape normative failure into queer success. Bareback or with a saddle, we enter a world of equestrian stunts, perversely elegant lines, and a plethora of morphed props. We get a glimpse of the vulnerable grace of the body, be it through Estermann's unique encounters between boys and horses or Oderbolz's sculptures *jumping over* archetypal hurdles.

Estermann and Oderbolz challenge our perception of tradition, norms, using deviation, transgression, the performative or the whimsical to skew our worldview. Behavior as well as our notion of Self in relation to the Other, sees itself being warped and questioned. What do we deem as appropriate? How do we understand a space that welcomes uncomfortable junctures, projects an experiential realm of in-betweenness and aligns itself with queer ideas of liminality?¹

Text on Works by Robert Estermann

Boy / Horse (preparatory drawing for a mural inside a Parisian staircase, later becoming the template for *Four Boys / Four Horses #1*), 1995

Four Boys / Four Horses #2 Applied Template, 1996-2023

Four Boys / Four Horses #2 #3 #4, 2023

Four Boys / Four Horses Mugs, 2000

For this exhibition we have taken an "archeological" approach, looking back at an older series of Robert Estermann's drawings *Four Boys / Four Horses* (1996). What are the questions that come up when we encounter this image? The boy seems to be otherworldly, with his Mona Lisa half-smile, gazing at us innocently. The horse, of uncertain gender, is calm and surprisingly curious. Could the line drawing be abstracting, impairing, or even subverting our full comprehension of what's going on in the image? What is it that is making us deal or not deal with these unruly lines?

The source materials at the entrance produce a time travel back to the artist's studio. It's 1995-96, when Robert was studying at École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris. *Four Boys / Four Horses* started as one drawing before becoming four drawings, with each image staging a singular experience. Exhibited at Last Tango, *Boy / Horse* is the preparatory drawing for a mural inside a Parisian staircase, later becoming the template for *Four Boys / Four Horses #1*. At this point in time, three of the original drawings of *Four Boys / Four Horses* have apparently been misplaced by a gallery. However, the paper cuts (templates) are as Robert describes them, "the DNA that never got destroyed." Ultimately, as the exhibition goes on, Robert will perform on the paper, producing a new work. One of the rare constants in his work is the expressionism of the angles. Robert gets excited by the idea of movement of a line, the radicality of the angle, the freedom of a line to relate to our existence. The three "missing" drawings exist fictionally in a composite photograph titled *Four Boys / Four Horses #2 #3 #4*, sourced from the artist's archive. Robert is standing proudly in front of his work. What happens when we see three of these drawings in their original frieze-like hanging? The mugs, because of their mass-produced everyday object appeal, enable another access to this drawing series.

¹ "Liminality as a concept brings together queer ways of thinking through unboundedness, spillage, fluidity, multiplicity, and processes of contingent, non-linear becoming, as well as the relations of power and regulation that seek their stability or closure. It can ground these in everyday lived realities." Loren March, "Queer and trans* geographies of liminality: A literature review", *Progress in Human Geography* Volume 45, Issue 3 (June 2021): <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0309132520913111>

Riding.Vision Warehouse, 2023

Riding.Vision Info Desk, 2016-ongoing

Riding.Vision is a fully working and daily updated online concept store and research platform that was founded in 2016 as an art project. It is a work in progress. While the theme and history of (human) rider and horse is anything but new, Riding.Vision's approach is unique, as it liquifies the boundaries between traditions, narratives, subcultural expressions, desires, the non-compatible, and the potential embarrassment. It also tells stories of obsession, dominance, colonialism, spectacle and modernity. Avoiding habitual safeguards offered by dogma, taste judgment or cynicism, Riding.Vision assumes the role of a collector and incubator through its own post-colonial mass production and added value of images system. One of Estermann's postulates here is that the resulting new composite materialities of the products and the roughness are agents of new liberties and great, unexplored chances.

Text on Works by Oz Oderbolz

Juicy, 2023

Hell Rider, 2023

Dick Hammer, 2023

Oz's series of sculptures suspended in space, are also suspended between fiction and reality. After a process of formal abstraction and material alterations the use value of the objects embedded onto the saddle seats has been altered. Oz is interested in the potential of their signifying function becoming dysfunctional and ultimately the potential of the queer art of failure (Halberstam). In *Dick Hammer* (2023) we see a squirming face with bleak eyes shaped as a teardrop. Oz has been researching the iconic Marlboro man and the common reading of this figure as a masculine archetype, reserved and rugged. In their study of other male archetypes (Daddy, Hero, Farmer etc.) and their related imageries they subvert the conventional masculine constructions by subjecting the objects to failure. The saddles, worn down by wear (bodily contact, sweat, outdoor use, etc.) are in absence of a body, yet curiously strongly imply the body, and symbolically allude to making visible what's usually unseen. Their elaborate symmetries and layered volumes made more manifest through the strapping. Oz deliberately seeks to highly aestheticize the saddle, the communication link between horse and rider, aestheticizing a vision of liberation and desire. In *Hell Rider* (2023) the tin is sourced from Catholic church chalices and is titled after a sex toy. In *Juicy* (2023) the seat is embellished with Swarovski rhinestones referring to the iconic velour tracksuit which became a luxury staple in the 2000s and was popularised by Paris Hilton.

***Daddy's Shirt*, 2023**

In a defiant act, Oz stole their father's sleeveless undershirt also known as a "muscle shirt" some twenty years ago. A basic purpose of an undershirt is to absorb your sweat. As a fashion garment it has been associated with white working-class and outspoken conservative males. The metal structure which was originally a projector mount is literally stretching masculinity and its construction round and round to its limit. Discretely, yet firmly anchored onto it, we see a penis head protruding.

***These Boots Are Made for Walkin'*, 2023**

Oz was raised in rural surroundings with their adopted twin brother and two other siblings in the canton of Uri. Suggesting a performative stride into the space, Oz transforms a staple of practical foot wear in the farmlands, namely the wellington boot, into a fetishistic high heel. Its material stretched to capacity and sleekly tuned with spurs for exaggerative enhancement.