

MICHAEL MÜLLER

THE GIVEN DAY.

CASTOR & POLYDEUCES

EXTENDED UNTIL 23 APRIL 2023

Collection of Contemporary Art

Frankfurt am Main, 14 September 2022. From 14 October 2022 to 19 February 2023 the Städel Museum is presenting a solo exhibition by German-British artist Michael Anthony Müller (born 1970). In three exhibition sections, the artist takes visitors into the mythological world of Ancient Greece with an expansive installation, drawings, paintings, and a sculpture.

The piece *The Given Day* (2021–2022), based on the Ancient Greek myth of the Dioscuri, the twins Castor and Polydeuces, forms the heart of the exhibition. In battle, the inseparable brothers are divided by the death of Castor, a mortal. Zeus grants the two brothers a shared life – a life between the worlds. Henceforth the brothers alternate between a day spent in Hades, the realm of the dead, and a day on Olympus amongst the gods. A prologue consisting of Müller's drawings and a sculpture interacts with works on paper from the Städel Museum's collection to familiarize visitors with the myth. With his site-specific piece *The Given Day*, Müller also has different concepts of time enter into dialogue: Firstly, there is the physical notion of time, which allows for a subdivision of time segments into objective units; secondly, there is human-existential time, which evades such a strict subdivision. The work measures a total of 6 x 65 metres and is made up of 24 large-format canvases. They symbolize the 24 hours of the day, and Müller painted each exclusively at the hour of the day for which the respective canvas stands. The exhibition culminates in the garden halls, where Müller presents further groups of works and quite literally accompanies the visitors into the "underworld".

By means of painting, but while also going beyond its boundaries, in the Städel Museum Müller thus presents a multi-faceted artistic reflection on the meaning of time, mortality, and love that endures outside time. In the process, he weighs up the potential of abstraction and asks the crucial question: Can an abstract artwork tell a story?

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“The audience of the Städel Museum is invited to immerse themselves in Michael Müller’s pictorial world. His paintings present a contemplative, almost meditative way of working that includes thinking about the way the works evolve and highlighting that process. With the Michael Müller solo exhibition, the Städel Museum is presenting an artist who, in his most recent works, reflects on the significance and boundaries of painting in the 21st century,” comments Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum.

Svenja Grosser, curator of the exhibition, elaborates on this: “Ostensible opposites such as day and night, death and life, reality and abstraction, image and copy not only get juxtaposed to each other in Michael Müller’s works, but brought together on the canvas. Here, cultural and historical conditions play a role, as does exploring the reach of painting, something that is an elementary part of Müller’s conceptual approach.”

Prologue

In the prologue to the exhibition, Michael Müller presents both works from the Städel Museum collection and works of his own by way of introducing central themes of the myth of the Dioscuri and its reception. The inseparable twin brothers – they are the sons of Leda, sired by different fathers but on the same night – are torn apart by the death of Castor, a mortal, in battle. Polydeuces, who is divine, pleads with his father Zeus to strip him of his immortality so that he can be reunited with Castor in Hades, the realm of the dead. Touched by the twins’ love for each other, Zeus gifts the Dioscuri the opportunity henceforth to live together, alternating one day in the underworld of the dead with one day on Olympus.

The fall into the underworld is outlined in Hendrick Goltzius’ sequence *The Four Disgracers* dating from 1588. The copperplate engravings show figures from mythology who dared go against the Gods’ commandments and were punished by death. The drawing *Two Men, Seated, Looking in a Mirror, and a Seated Boy* created by Italian painter and illustrator Jacopo Pontormo in 1520, takes up both the theme of the twin brothers and that of the mirror: As twins, Castor and Polydeuces are each the human image of the other. In his sculpture *Dioscuri (Aplysia Speculum Figura)* (2022), Michael Müller takes up the theme of the mirror, as the bronze sculpture of a horse’s head (a reference to Castor’s existence as a tamer of horses) is doubled up by means of a mirror. The basic traits of the narrative of Castor and Polydeuces are also to be found in Vedic mythology in Hinduism, to which Müller refers with the symbolic hand gestures, the Mudras, in his drawings *सैंडक्रेपे मुद्रा (Saindakraipe Mudra)*, *आत्मसमर्पण मुद्रा (Aatmasamarpan Mudra)*, and *ईगल विंग मुद्रा (Eegal Ving Mudra)*. They illustrate that there is likewise a doubling or mirroring inscribed into the

human body owing to its vertical central axis, and this is emphasized by the two drawings next to each other of the artist's outstretched arms.

The Given Day

The centrepiece of the exhibition is the eponymous work *The Given Day* (2021–2022) which, measuring 6 x 65 metres, fills the entire exhibition hall. It is made up of 24 large-format canvases and reflects the course of an entire day. At each hour of the day, over a longer period of time Michael Müller repeatedly worked to paint the corresponding canvas, using acrylic and lacquer and frequently applying the pigment direct by hand. At some points, the artist has strengthened and emphasized the subdivisions of the work, at others instead negated it by over-painting and in this way connected up the canvases. This approach shows two interacting models of time: the ongoing, subjective flow of time and its objective segmentation into regular units. Michael Müller adds further levels of time to this by relying on different printing techniques to take digitally processed fragments from images painted previously and using them as the basis for the respective painting. Some parts of *The Given Day* were, moreover, documented photographically during their production and then crop up again as manipulated printing templates at different places on the canvases. Different layers of time become superimposed and thus mutually strengthen or indeed erase one another.

Hades

The shared day that Castor and Polydeuces spend in Olympus gives way to the next day, spent in Hades. In the garden halls, in the third section of the exhibition, Michael Müller presents, for example, his series of the same name that takes up the theme of the work *The Given Day*: A single image generated from the entire, monumental work forms the basis for the two paintings *Tyndareos' Crossing (Contradicting Reality)* and *Castor and Polydeuces*, which bring *The Given Day* back to mind as memories.

Michael Anthony Müller (born in 1970 in Ingelheim am Rhein) lives and works in Berlin. He studied Sculpture and Fine Art at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art under Magdalena Jetelová, before living for eight years in the High Himalayas in Alchi and Changspa (Ladakh). From 2015 to 2018 he was a guest professor at Berlin University of the Arts. His paintings, sculptures, video works, performances, and installations have been shown in international group and solo exhibitions. Between 2013 and 2017, the exhibition cycle *Eighteen Exhibitions* included 33 exhibition projects and four performances, presented at Galerie Thomas Schulte, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, and Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden. In 2017 Müller was

nominated for the Kunstpreis der Böttcherstraße, Bremen, and in 2013 he was one of the nominees for the Berlin Art Prize and the winner of the Sanofi Art Project.

STÄDEL INVITES MICHAEL MÜLLER

Live event with the artist, music & drinks

On Friday, 14 October, curator Svenja Grosser will talk with Michael Anthony Müller about his exhibition *The Given Day. Castor & Polydeuces*. Short guided tours offer visitors an opportunity to discover the Städel Museum's Collection of Contemporary Art and learn about exciting links to the artist's works. The evening is rounded out by drinks and a DJ set.

Tickets cost 5 Euro and are available in the online shop at shop.staedelmuseum.de or from the ticket office that evening. Doors open at 6.30 pm

The STÄDEL INVITES event series takes place in partnership with BMW on the occasion of exhibitions by selected contemporary artists.

MICHAEL MÜLLER THE GIVEN DAY. CASTOR & POLYDEUCES

Exhibition dates: 14 October 2022 to 23 February 2023 – extended until April 23 2023

Curator: Svenja Grosser (Deputy Head of the Collection of Contemporary Art, Städel Museum)

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main, Germany

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Opening hours: Tue, Wed, Fri, Sat, Sun + holidays, 10.00 am – 6.00 pm; Thu 10.00 am – 9.00 pm

Special opening hours: For up-to-date information on special opening hours, please visit www.staedelmuseum.de/en

Tickets and admission: Tickets can be purchased in advance online at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Special price through 16 October: 10 EUR. The special price is a reduced admission fee effective during the installation of a new colour and lighting scheme of the Modern Art Collection. The special price applies to all visitors, including school pupils, students, vocational trainees, unemployed persons, and visitors with a 50-per-cent or higher degree of disability. Starting 18 October: 16 EUR, reduced 14 EUR. Admission free for children under 12.

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Städel Blog (in German): for more background, don't miss a post: blog.staedelmuseum.de/blog-abonnieren