

Neverending Stories

21 January — 7 August 2022

Introduction

The exhibition “Neverending Stories” presents works by Mario Cassisa (1929 — 2008), Annamaria Tosini (1930 — 2013) and Lea Oetken (* 1959). The first two artists come from Sicily, while Lea Oetken lives and works in Zurich. The origins and works of these three artists differ widely. Mario Cassisa and Annamaria Tosini process more or less everything in front of them through their pictures and objects and turn it into exuberant works. Their artistic expressions are spontaneous, colorful and diverse, bringing a touch of Sicilianità to Zurich, and exude the inexhaustible vitality of artistic creation. While Annamaria Tosini’s sculptures could have jumped out of Mario Cassisa’s pictures, Lea Oetken’s “double-image sculptures”, reduced in color, shape and material, serve as a counterpoint to the exuberance of the Sicilian artists. It is the interplay of the works of the three artists who differ from one another in style, technique, motif and creative process, that makes the exhibition so attractive. The works do not compete with each other but enhance their impact via their differences.

Energetic, obsessive and largely independent of public recognition, the works of the three artists are “neverending stories” that will continue to outlast their own existence and carry on with infinite creative power.

Entresol

After you pass the large leporello and pictures at the entrance, the staircase leads into a world of color and form, the world of the Sicilian Mario Cassisa. The installations of Zurich-based Lea Oetken are on the mezzanine. She stages trivial everyday objects by taking them out of their usual context and placing them into a different context so that they are perceived anew through the respective arrangement. As a result, the objects are no longer identified with their original function, but are given a new meaning. This process enables a recasting of entrenched perspectives and dehisces, as a seed pod splits open, to reveal a form of materialized poetry.

Visitors can experience for themselves how this process works. The objects, tools and rarities provided on the pedestal and in the wooden case invite you to be active. Available to everyone who is inspired by the pleasurable arrangements of Lea’s installations, they help you develop your own creations. Do not hesitate and let yourself be surprised how new things can be created in a playful manner. The participatory installation is a work in progress, a neverending sto-



MARIO CASSISA IN HIS ATELIER

ry that is constantly changing over the course of the exhibition and is continuously documented on our website at musee@home.

Large Exhibition Hall

The wooden cube in the exhibition hall is unmistakable. It was built into the museum space based on Mario Cassisa’s studio in Sicily and serves as a pavilion that invites visitors to come in. The pavilion is stacked to the ceiling with an abundance of large-format designs on old posters, pictures and Biblio Quadri (a word created by Cassisa that he used to describe the “treasure chests” containing his leporellos and Artist’s Books). Immerse yourself in the baroque richness of Cassisa’s lavish world of shapes and colors.

Born in Palermo in 1929, Mario Cassisa left Sicily, a land partially destroyed during World War II, to start a new life in the US. In the US, he trained as an interior decorator and earned his living as a window dresser. Mario Cassisa was a restless spirit and curious about life and the world. He traveled with modest means but a lot and all over, absorbing impressions and experiences like a sponge. Impressions were welcomed by him and flowed into his dense, unmistakable imagery. Cassisa’s pictures, sculptures

and Biblio Quadri are like unfiltered journals — or rather, actual books of life in which one event follows the next and many things happen simultaneously and intuitively. Cassisa worked with the simplest means, cut out what seemed important to him, copied, pasted, pasted over, painted, drew and wrote on the surfaces. That technique produced dialogues with the world and the many facets of himself. In spite of Cassisa's busy travel activities, his works are reminiscent of the aesthetics of Sicilian Carretti (painted donkey carts) — an expression of his deep connection with his country of origin. The globetrotter remained Sicilian at heart and died there in 2008.

If you look around carefully in Mario Cassisa's studio, you will discover not only Cassisa's works but also three-dimensional works of art by Paul Amar (1919 — 2017). There is no evidence that Cassisa knew Amar's work. Yet, the lush glamor of Amar's shell objects fits perfectly with the colorful world of the Sicilian who, by the way, had collected an abundance of inspirations and would have enjoyed the works of Paul Amar. Paul Amar was born in Algeria in 1919; he had French, Catholic and Sephardic Jewish roots. At a young age, his life was marked by violence, war and imprisonment. Surprisingly, however, those horrible experiences seemed to have hardly left a mark on his cheerful nature. He remained a positive person and later worked in Paris as a hairdresser and taxi driver, a confidante to many prostitutes. At the age of 50, he discovered small figurines made from seashells in a souvenir shop by the ocean. Immediately fascinated by them, he started to design objects from shells and crustaceans, non-stop for the rest of his life. Using nail polish, glitter and acrylic paints, he transformed shells and crustaceans into glamorous works of art. The design of the shell works became both an obsession and an elixir of life for him.

Glamor is a theme that is also inherent in Annamaria Tosini's works. She was born into a bourgeois family in Palermo in 1930. The flourishing and subsequent financial ruin of her family affected her both physically and emotionally. It was only in the nursing home that she began to process her loss of a luxurious life creatively. She



made sculptures, hats and fans of paper and all kinds of found materials. The objects created in that context express her grief over her paradise lost and the broken dreams that accompanied her loss. However, the objects are also an attempt to record and continue the stories of the former glamor with her own modest means in order to save the objects for herself and posterity. This self-imposed task became a never-ending story for Annamaria Tosini and gave her the strength to be creative until the end of her days and to be happy despite her fate.

Lea Oetken is also a historian in her own right. Painted on safety glass, her figures are the “never-ending story” of a tireless search for human existence. Since the 1980s, she has been working on so-called “double-image sculptures” to depict as many facets of human existence as possible. Set up freely in the room or as groups, placed in front of a mirror or hung from two small holes as the one at the reception, the figures can float or be put together with hinges so that they can be perceived and experienced from different perspectives and distances. Just as the meaning of the individual objects in Lea's installations change depending on the constellation, so do the individual figures on the double-image sculptures according to their surroundings. The viewers are invited to walk around them, look through them or join the painted “conspecifics” and continue the story of human existence that Lea Oetken addresses in her double-image sculptures, with their own thoughts and images.

Getting involved in the double-image sculptures can trigger a plethora of feelings and perceptions. Not all figures have a pleasant charisma. Some can even be repulsive. Their faces seldom correspond to our ideas of a human face. The expression is often distorted, geometrized, alienated or alienating. The posture as well as the expression of a figure carry its mood and provide information about its character or state of mind. Often, Lea Oetken expresses different facets in both sides of the same figure, reflecting the different sides that human beings naturally have. For example, a figure can appear insecure and introverted on one side of the glass, and proud and extroverted on the other.



DOUBLE-IMAGE SCULPTURE BY LEA OETKEN

The double-image sculptures have no titles. This leaves more space for your own thoughts.

Pavillon

In the three showcases in the pavilion, historical photographs, personal documents, sketchbooks, etc. give an insight into the lives of the three extraordinary artists and round off the tour of the exhibition.

You can find more information in the accompanying publication that is available in our shop for CHF 5.



SCULPTURE BY ANNAMARIA TOSINI

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