

Jokes Jest Frippery

A poetic show to amaze and delight you.
11. March 2020 — 20. December 2020

Dubbed «King of the Clowns», Grock was a legend and a gifted performer. Reason enough for his comeback in a bizarre exhibition that celebrates the craft of fun: on display are historical sketches of Grock, the poetic film *The Red Blue (Der Rote Blau)* by Isa Hesse starring the pantomime Roy Bosier, surprises from the atelier of Dimitri, pictures of clowns by the outsider artist Camille Bombois, as well as strange objects by Kirila Faeh and Pirkko Fleig, inviting you to laugh and linger on.

Camille Bombois (1883 — 1970)



Son of a deckhand, Camille Bombois grew up in poverty on a barge. When he was young, he earned a living as a farmhand and gained a reputation for his strength. At a vaudeville show in his village, he picked fights with the strongmen, «les hommes forts». That was the stepping stone for his career at Circus Gay and Circus Minard-Caron where he beat amateurs and professionals in show fights. For many years, he lived the circus life and clowns, wrestlers and artists feature prominently in his work as a painter.

Bombois started painting at age 16, without ambition, just for the fun of it. That he was able to earn money with his art and, finally, to live off it, he owes to his wife, his favorite model. During WWI, it was she who sold his paintings clandestinely behind his

back, thus precipitating his breakthrough as a painter. Today, he belongs to the “the five primitive masters” celebrated by Wilhelm Uhde, along with Henri Rousseau, Séraphine, André Bauchant and Louis Vivin.

Roy Bosier (1931 — 2006)

Roy Bosier was a man of many talents and an almost equal number of handicaps. That he made it into show business despite his deafness is not only the result of his great artistic gifts and his passion, but is also due to a positive outlook on life and his almost bound-



less energy. Born Roy Bosshard in Scotland, he came to Switzerland with his mother and his sister when he was a toddler. Here, he learned to read lips and minimally articulate himself. The spoken language, however, was never his medium. His means of expression were his body and his facial expressions. He became a famous pantomime, dancer, choreographer and movement trainer, founded his own company of clowns called *i Gesti di Roma* and worked with many well-known theater people, film makers and stars, e.g. Sergio Leone and Christoph Marthaler. The change of name from “Bosshard” to “Bosier” is not a la-di-da fancy but, since Bosshard phonetically resembles “beaux arts” in French, his birth name often led to misunderstandings. During the last two decades of his life, Bosier and his daughter Sara lived in close prox-

imity to what is now the Musée Visionnaire, and he worked as a choreographer, movement trainer and performer at the public theater in Zürich (“Schauspielhaus”). He also continued his education and became a physical therapist. As Roy, he was “one of us” in the Niederdorf: active as a human being, therapist and well-meaning neighbor, he also taught acrobatics classes at the neighborhood school Hirschengraben for kids and adults. To make a long story short, Roy Bosier was well-liked and conquered hearts wherever he went. He can be seen as an actor in *The Red Blue* (*Der Rote Blau*, directed by Isa Hesse, 1971), a poetic film restored by the Zuerich University of the Arts (ZHdK) by Fred Truniger as part of the project «Swiss film experiments – 1950–1988»..

Dimitri (1935 – 2016)

At the age of seven, when Dimitri saw Andreff, the clown, at Circus Knie, he knew he wanted to become a clown. As a compromise formation, he went through an apprenticeship at the pottery studio of Margrit Linck-Daepf in Bern and took night classes in acting and acrobatics and played the clarinet. Grock, the king of the clowns, became his idol and master although he never met him in person. On July 14, 1959, the first day of his contract



as a professional clown, Dimitri learned that Grock had passed away. Shortly thereafter, Dimitri debuted with his first feature-length solo program — at the traditional Castagnata in Ascona! Local and international job offers followed and Dimitri went from Verscio (Ticino), to Paris, Berlin, Greece, England, New York City, South America, China, Japan, etc.

For three seasons, he — the first clown to not originate from within a circus — toured as the so-to-speak national clown with the Circus Knie, Switzerland’s leading circus company. Dimitri was a man of many talents and never ran out of ideas. Until his last breath, he worked as a clown, director, actor, stage designer and costume designer. He also painted and drew and created the kind of objects that are on display here at the MV: “I am not a sculptor, — I am a clown who makes objects. Actually they are subjects, namely my dreams that came alive», he wrote on his homepage. Yet, he could not realize one of his last great dreams, a silent film close to finish when Dimitri disappeared for good.

Kirila Faeh (1953, lives in Zürich)

Kirila Faeh (*1953 near Zagreb, HR), studied painting and obtained a MA in graphic design from the Academy of Fine Arts of Zagreb. Despite her academic training, she positions herself vehemently outside of the art context: “Making money with my art is not what I do,” she says. As a young woman, she lived in New York City where she met Maurice Faeh, her Swiss husband. When they eventually relocated to Zurich with their small child, Kirila had to re-orient herself as a person and



as an artist. She wanted to distance herself from what she had previously seen, experienced, and learned and develop her own style. Meanwhile, she found it: for more than 20 years, she has been working with organic materials that she finds on her daily walks in the woods. In her hands, filigree objects, made out of twigs, seed cases, leaves, bird

feathers, dried mushrooms and fruit, develop a life of their own. Her objects provide a new perspective on things that would have been otherwise carelessly overlooked, foregrounding an aesthetics of treasures in our consciousness. Her Twiggy Twists — which is what she calls her slim figurines — inhabit their own odd world, like her porcelain doll heads. They find their counterpart in Faeh's collages, in which amorphous patches of color and natural materials merge into grotesque, sometimes clownish beings and grim figures.

Pirkko Fleig (*1958, lives in Piedmont, Italy)

Due to a lack of finances, Pirkko Fleig, a trained carpenter, has been collecting trash for many years – her own and that of acquaintances, found or created. Nothing is bought, not even at the flea market. Everything is stowed in large drawers until they overflow. Then everything is re-purposed: the plastic parts, empty bottles of brandy or nail polish or perfume bottles, toy cars, Playmobil parts, glitter garlands, rick rack, fabric and plastic ribbons, champagne and bottle caps, Barbie dolls, chocolate wrappers, squeezed tubes and all the trifles that accumulated for years. Since 2006, Pirkko has also been making illuminated objects. Initially, it was a gimmick that enabled Pirkko



to give her friends and acquaintances original and inexpensive gifts. Over time, the “jellyfish”, “beetle”, “male”, “circus” and so on lamps developed into a great passion and a distinctive trademark. In a process that sometimes lasts for years, the odds and ends are carefully processed to shine in new, unprecedented splendor. The sight of the glamorous objects makes

you forget that they all came from the worthless trash of our throw-away society. They would fit perfectly into the grotesque ambience of Grock's Villa, which happens to be not far from Fleig's chosen home in Piedmont.

Adrien Wettach alias Grock (1880 – 1959)

Adrien Wettach wanted to fly high early. When he had broken off a watchmaking apprenticeship at the age of 16 with four francs in his pocket and travelled to Hungary to take up a job as a tutor for a count, he promised his mother that he would return as a «made man». He did just that. The versatile, talented Wettach earned his spurs as a musician, contortionist, juggler and clown, proving himself abroad. Engagements with various European circus companies were the fruit of it. Adrien Wettach became the legendary clown Grock, who performed with Marius Galante, Géo Lolé and Max van Embden. His most important teacher and stage partner was Umberto Guillaume alias Antonet, with whom he traveled halfway around the world. But Grock's fame is built on his own stage sketch from the early 1930s, in which he jumps from a broken chair onto the backrest, with his unforgettable «Waruuuuuum?» and «Nit may be possible!». At the zenith of his fame, he built a kitschy,



splendid, neo-baroque villa in Oneglia (Italy, Province of Imperia) that was adorned by Grock's stylized mask in all its variants. Grock was omnipresent: carved in stone on the facade, inlaid in the floors, in the railings as an ornament and even in the garden as a flower pattern. However due to financial difficulties after a failed film project, he

could not retire early in his castle-like property. Thanks to his performances, he was able to recover financially, but after World War II, his reputation was tarnished because he had entertained Nazi Germany for years.

concept: Manuela Hitz, Yvonne Türler

curator: Manuela Hitz

text: Yvonne Türler

proof-reading: Gernot Mair

translation: Françoise Dufey (French), Dr. Nina Zimnik (English)

loans: Bally Schuhmuseum, Sara Bosshard, Famiglia Dimitri, Kirila Faeh, Pirkko Fleig,
Raymond Naef, Sammlung S. Brunner, privater Leihgeber

construction: Freddy Biniok, Alex Cekic, Meret Draeyer, Pirkko Fleig, Norbert Günther, Sarah Lebeck-Jobe

art education: Freddy Biniok, Iluska Grass, Manuela Hitz, Lea Hofer, Ursula Sax, Christina Studer, Yvonne Türler

Thank you to our sponsors!

The support of the following institutions, foundations and people allowed us to mount the exhibition
„Jest Jokes Frippery“:

Beitragsfonds des Finanzdepartements der Stadt Zürich, Sara Bosshard, Ernst Göhner Stiftung, Kirila Faeh, Pirkko Fleig, Dr. Jörg Furrer, Silver Hesse, Christoph Kuhmann, Mesch & Ugge Filmproduktionen AG, Raymond Naef, Annemarie Schindler Foundation, Fred Truniger, as well as other Foundations, Patrons and Members of the Musée Visionnaire who wish to remain anonymous. Their generosity made it all possible!

We extend a very special “thank you” to our volunteers at the reception and behind the scenes, and to everyone who contributes to the Musée Visionnaire.