

Spieglein, Spieglein
 25.4.– 19.5.2024
 An exhibition
 by Sylvain Gelewski

As the result of a 4-months residency, Sihl Delta is pleased to present Sylvain Gelewski's *Spieglein, Spieglein*, a multi-disciplinary and site-specific installation spreading over two spaces. Its title is inspired by the repeated phrase of a witch from a popular children's story.

The phrase is used here literally, as an advertising slogan, in reaction to Sihl Delta's location in the heart of a shopping complex. It is also applied in a physical way, through the mirror effect created by the installation and the pieces that make it up, repeated or duplicated from one room of the exhibition space to the next. The project deals with the circulation of money, superficiality and working environments in the cultural world.

What do we see reflecting in the mirror? We project beauty, health, careers, and money onto ourselves. We tell ourselves to be careful, to keep smiling, but also to secure a house, a job, and a planet. In the face of a challenging world, what are the true battles to fight? What happened to the carefree days of flowers?

"The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it, namely the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the persona, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face."

– Carl Jung, *Archetype and the Collective Unconscious* (1935)

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" Around us, a myriad of billboards and promotional videos bombard us with well-being punchlines, the latest trends and must-have items to buy at any cost. This consumerist frenzy is unsettling, if not anxiety-inducing. Let's put on our beauty masks, hoping they will disguise our inner conflicts.

Geneva-based artist Sylvain Gelewski spent four months at Sihl Delta, an artist residency space in the heart of Sihlcity, Zurich's vast shopping mall. Inspired by this consumption epicentre, he creates a double-installation with multiple interpretations, perhaps as a strategy of withdrawal or escape from an overly oppressive reality. The two exhibition rooms, juxtaposed and contrasting, embody Zurich's heraldic colours: white and blue. For the artist, this is a given condition which reflects the hosting city. An earlier version of this body of work was presented in Sandviken in Sweden in 2023, where the installation *Tempus Fugit* was displayed in yellow (gold) and blue. Often bridging resonance and dissonance in his work, Sylvain Gelewski evokes the similarities between Sweden and Switzerland; two pseudo-neutral countries vaunted for their image of

good students, places of compromise and cleanliness, yet concealing a far more complex reality. Let's put our exemplary masks back on.

Immersed in a baroque-contemporary setting with scent and sound, *Spieglein, Spieglein* brings us face to face with a profound interiority. As words resonate through space, visitors find themselves propelled into the artist's psyche, his inner voices speaking at different levels of consciousness, between childhood memories, fears and existential reflections. The two rooms depict distinct states of mind: on one side, the self's relationship to ambition, social behaviours and superficiality. On the other, a more isolated and introspective voice manifests.

Like a living sculpture, a performer in a white and blue dress, wearing a double mask, traverses the spaces and wanders gently like an apparition. The "persona" - a term deriving from ancient theatre that describes the mask worn by actors on stage - becomes the project of a fictitious identity, a social facade worn in public. In Carl Jung's psychiatrist model of the psyche, the persona lies between the ego and society. By invoking different sources from Venetian masks to Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, Sylvain Gelewski addresses the ambiguity of identity, what is visible, revealed, or hidden.

All around, objects wrapped in scraps of canvas recall a "benestante" milieu, where social conventions proliferate. These objects, dehierarchised by their chromatic uniformity, seem to transcend their primary function in favour of an enigmatic staging. Gleaned by Sylvain Gelewski in the streets or collected

through a non-commercial Telegram group, these objects take on an obsessive character, revealing an emotional ambivalence but also a recuperating practice intimately linked to the artist's precarious situation.

At the centre of the two rooms is a table, a symbol of norms of good conduct which marks the onset of the social game. In a famous scene from Luis Buñuel's film *The Ghost of Liberty* (1974), the surrealist director overturns bourgeois conventions by undressing his guests and having them sit around a table on toilets instead of chairs. Comedy, with its exaggeration and referential tactics, offers a means of distancing, even extracting from reality. In particular, humour as a critical tool can be used to highlight social dysfunctions. Especially cherished in *Commedia dell'arte*, this genre transforms situations into ridicule, just as it caricatures its characters in extreme archetypes, underlining their often mediocre position on the social ladder.

Within this comedic tradition, the jester, or king's fool, finds its incarnation. The small paintings on the wall from Sylvain Gelewski's series *The Court Jester* portray various jesters or jokers. Known in the Middle Ages for amusing the noble courts, this marginal figure was uniquely permitted to mock the sovereign. They performed at great banquets, where opulence and extravagance reigned. Queer, marginal, grotesque, neurodivergent (or rather "neuro-diverse" as Sylvain suggests) but essential to social amusement, the fool cynically becomes the antagonistic mirror of a

society, revealing its symptomatic use and rejection.

For Sylvain Gelewski, the contemporary jester is today's artist: an emblem of dissidence and marginalisation. And yet, despite a profound desire to break away from conventions, artists find themselves instrumentalised by the same system that sustains them. In the entertainment industry, artists become their product but also their prophecy.

In an age of fast-paced consumption, technology and quest for self, isn't it time to extract oneself and value the benefits of solitude? Between conforming and subverting, *Spieglein, Spieglein* confronts us with ambiguities and questions encapsulating the perpetual, interdependent and complex duality: „I'm an artist, I am not".

After all this, mirror, mirror, do you still dare to judge?

– Camille Regli

Spieglein, Spieglein

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Open Saturdays & Sundays 2–6 p.m.

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Sylvain Gelewski (*1991, Nyon, CH) is an artist and curator who graduated in Contemporary Art Practices from HEAD–Geneva, CH, in 2019. His work encompasses painting, installation, writing, performance, and curating. He is interested in lists, colours, political events, neurodivergence, and the value of work, through a play between norms and their most superfluous details.

Recent solo projects include *Back Beat Bolaget*, Sandviken, SE (2023); *Dogo Residenz*, Lichtensteig, CH (2021); *E-Werk*, Freiburg im Breisgau, DE (2020); *Théâtre Pitoëff*, Geneva, CH (2019). Recent group projects include *Kunsthalle Trier*, DE; *HiFlow*, Geneva, CH (2024); *Ausstellungsraum Klingental*, Basel, CH; *Raum für Sichtbarkeit*, Berlin, DE (2023); *Flux Laboratory*, Geneva, CH; *der TANK*, Basel, CH (2022); *Cité internationale des arts*, Paris, FR (2021); *Centre d'Art Contemporain*, Geneva, CH; *Fabienne Levy Gallery*, Lausanne, CH; *Centre d'Art Contemporain*, Yverdon-les-Bains, CH (2020); *Archivio Conz*, Berlin, DE (2019).

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