

KASPAR MÜLLER

ALLEGIANCE AND OBLIVION

October 24 - November 22, 2014

«Allegiance and Oblivion» is Kaspar Müller's first solo exhibition at the gallery; also it launches the program of the new location in via Ventura 6.

The exhibition offers a continuation of the artist's research around the migration of meanings and values commonly attributed to images and objects. Articulated on the two floors of the gallery, it gathers a wide arrangement of artworks: at first glance, the works give themselves to the viewer in the shape of icons or constellations of symbols; more vaguely, they operate as devices that expand in space and time, to suggest alternative scenarios of dispersion and recapture. The title itself is meant to suggest a dialectical friction between a loyalty to the codes of cultures as of art (allegiance as devotion) and a reality of things which, alas, we are not able to grasp and rather constantly fail to achieve (oblivion, as amnesia, but also nothingness, silence). Exhibited in the basement, the work which gives the exhibition its title—*Allegiance and Oblivion (2014)*—features thirty-six portraits of historical figures whose action or thought nourished the human faith in the idea of progress: characters who can be recognized by the vague memories of school days, undisputed bastions of human culture; all gathered together, they rather raise a cacophony of individualisms and beliefs and doctrines that force that culture into indistinctness, or the vanity of the mere exercise of memory and recognition. In the work, history's exquisitely compiling ethos is deprived of any sense of reasonable evolution; indeed, it exists only to make up for abeyance—in a vein of pure negative dialectics.

Müller often infuses his artworks with a certain black humor: some are conceived to comment on the creative process itself and on creativity as a palliation of the effects of capitalist economy in sociocultural contexts such as the Western one in which we find ourselves. A mode of the Müller's process

is indeed accumulation of objects and images, which are submitted to the viewer beyond any cataloging or order, but only and joyfully in their variety and heterogeneity. Works which develop into series—think of furniture such as wardrobes, bookcases, trunks, etc., of which three examples are presented in the exhibition (White shelf, 2014; Silver shelf, 2014; Trunk, 2014)—coexist with works that include series of objects and/or images—think of the crowns of blown glass bubbles that are, perhaps, Müller's most iconic work; or of *The treasures of memory* (2014) presented on the ground floor, a crown of pearls and other precious which wraps the space as a subtle decoration.

In these works, a metonymic tension between the part and the whole, the single pearl and the whole crown, results, again, in a collection of individualities that the viewer can only experience in two ways: through the juxtaposition between the parts, hence the assertive exercise of comparing the quality of each pearl; or the awareness of one's own otherness in relation to the work, an entity alien to the viewer. These works are inclusive and engaging, but at the same they hint at the solitude as the work as of the viewer, both subjects doomed to wander among a multiplicity of status and contexts.

In order to emphasize this mutability of objects and images, and of men, whether they are artists or viewers, the exhibition includes works that evoke Müller's past: a canvas shows stills from the video *Colmar & Strasbourg* (2010); another one features stickers of photographs taken during a trip to Trinidad, a hint to the exhibition «I was in Trinidad and learned a lot» housed at Francesca Pia gallery, in Zurich, in 2011. Three paintings, finally, winking at the iconographic style of British artist Julian Opie, cite Müller's exhibition «I Shrunk the Kids» hosted in 2013 at the Kunsthalle Bern. As in *Allegiance* and *Oblivion*, these works do not stand for a masturbatory celebration of the artist's production and career—of history more in general; they rather attempt at forcing the artist and the viewer to cohabit with the past. Artworks, exhibitions, such as the lives of individual, become codes themselves, symbols to be reinvented, in that virtual dimension hovering between reality and abstraction, which is memory in the present.