

**HENRIK EIBEN**  
**THE SMILE AT THE FOOT OF THE LADDER**

The title of our new exhibition by **HENRIK EIBEN** (b 1975 in Tokyo) is taken from a short story by Henry Miller dating from 1948, in which a clown seeks not only to make his audience laugh, but also to impart to them a lasting joy.

At first sight, one associates **HENRIK EIBEN'S** works, created in recent weeks in his Hamburg studio, with the concept of minimalism, characterised by hard edges, elementary forms and industrial materials. He plays around with examples from minimal art, such as the works of Sol LeWitt or Ellsworth Kelly, but breaks away from its perfectionism by introducing a note of carefree humour. The colourful cuboids of acrylic glass in *Another Kind of Sky* are an exception: in contrast to the precise linear arrangements of Carl Andre or Donald Judd, here anarchy reigns, aided and abetted by the titles of the works, which are often taken from the music world: *Shir Eres*, *Lullaby to the Colors* or *Dulci Jubilo*. *Jawlensky's Smile*, a jazz song and a hymn, connected by the artist with Alexej Jawlensky who, suffering acute symptoms of paralysis in his hands during his last years, painted portraits reduced to single lines. He was the inspiration for **HENRIK EIBEN'S** new group of works, *Jawlensky's Smile*.

Since his studies in the Fibre Department of the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore in 2001, diversity of materials has played a major role in **HENRIK EIBEN'S** work. Brass, copper, lacquer, leather, wood and acrylic glass are combined, with unparalleled confidence, in a muted range of colours. *Odin* is an example: a right-angle of exotic wood holds a shape made of azure hand-blown glass. Closely fitted round the upper half of the glass, like the setting of a jewel, is a pistachio-green shape. The artist is constantly fascinated by the associations of the surfaces with diverse epochs or styles, and the haptic and optical qualities of various materials. He draws inspiration, he says, from the Surrealist willingness to experiment: "Art should be permitted everything but obliged to nothing".

Sol LeWitt's idea of conceiving his wall-drawings as guidelines inspired **HENRIK EIBEN** to his *Big Black Hop*: he develops the concept of his great American model to realise a monumental work made of oiled flamed oak: frames resembling casement windows project from four squares to cast a shadow which, in a singular fashion, incorporates the exhibition space into the art-work.

**HENRIK EIBEN'S** watercolours reflect the artist's wealth of ideas – now blocky and intensive, now quite delicate and poetic. A watercolour allows no correction; it demonstrates the irretrievability of immediate expression. Here we can follow how the artist develops his forms and colour combinations.

In designing the individual parts of his works he always has to bear in mind his intended final result, not to lose sight of the whole. Nevertheless, "art should develop its own life. It shows us the way and takes liberties, like the clown in Henry Miller's short story."

Salzburg, April 2020

Katja Mittendorfer