

# Roe Rosen:

## Kafka For Kids - The Paintings

10.03.22 — 23.04.22

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The extensive project **Kafka For Kids** features a full length movie (111 minutes) and around seventy gouaches on paper. The film integrates musical comedy with animation, drama, and political documentary. The plot takes place in a colorful and fantastic TV studio, 'the magical story-house', where a series of adaptations of Kafka's works for toddlers is being taped. In the first chapter, presented in the film, a personable grandfather (Jeff Francis), clad in a robe, reads to a curious little girl (Hani Furstenberg) the Metamorphosis - the tale of Gregor Samsa, a salesman who wakes up one morning to find himself transformed into a vermin.

The furniture and the objects on the set come to life and function somewhat like the chorus in the classical Greek theater, as well as a musical chorus. Ms. Lamp, Mr. Ball, and the painting Titorelli (referring to the character of the painter from Kafka's 'The Trial') perform the film's songs, accompanied by The Igor Krutogolov Toy Orchestra (Krutogolov also composed the soundtrack). From the onset, a complex problem arises: Kafka himself prohibited visual depictions of the vermin. Yet, the issue is quickly resolved as Kafka's left shoe approves it in his stead. For Roe Rosen, depicting the vermin - a liminal and ambiguous entity - is considered a parodic blasphemy of the venerated writer, yet, he does so with joy and pleasure. This comes out of an honest intention to expose different layers of beauty and temptation, and through the cinematic experience, to offer a deep understanding of Kafka's oeuvre. The visual interpretation brought on in this film reveals surprising references to fairytales, fantasies, comedy and play. It is this complexity that lies at the center of the Kafkaesque experience.

The animation portion of this project was born out of a deep desire to paint, imagine and create different characters and worlds. The exhibition features a selection of paintings created for the animated scenes, and others made as sketches for the studio set and for the Samsa family apartment. Alongside these paintings, several songs from the film are projected as teasers of sorts. In many of these gouaches, the portrait - which lies at the heart of painting since the renaissance - is a central theme for philosophic and aesthetic inquiry. The faces of the characters seem to be afflicted with an instability that echoes the formal obscurity of the vermin itself. Rosen gives life to the different features that make up these visages. This is especially heightened in the character of the cleaning woman, whose face is made of an assembly of round holes that constantly shift their position and function.

Like the protagonist of the story, the film itself goes through a transformation as well. It becomes dark and uncanny, among other means, through the commercial breaks that present unexpected ruptures in the plot. The amalgamation of the world of the Law - so central to the life and writing of Kafka - with ethical questions pertaining to the idea of childhood, in particular the question of what constitutes a child, is expressed with rigor towards the end of the film through the local and current political-legal system. A lecture promises to unfurl a complex legal rhetorics that brings the movie full circle to its initial question posed at the beginning: "what is a child?" The legally circumscribed answer given by local legislation is then entangled with contradictory statements to the absurd, some might say, the Kafkaesque.