

Roe Rosen: How to Hide Your Pains from Yourself

29.02.24 — 13.04.24

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

At the entrance to the exhibition, in a small and darkened room, hangs a black-pen drawing titled **Ice and Fire**. The somewhat dramatic name refers to a medical procedure in which a chemical substance inserted intravenously "ignites a fire" within the body, which is then extinguished by chewing ice. The patient, Roe Rosen, describes this burning-freezing procedure with chilling accuracy in his book **Lucy is Sick** (forthcoming), which tackles the theme of cancer. The text is divided into short and condensed chapters and accompanied by line drawings. These are presented under the guise of pleasantness and leisure as a coloring book.¹

In the shift from a drawing in black graphic lines to a large-format colorful oil painting, the private, individual catastrophe is transformed into different kinds of global disasters. For example, the work **Hot and Cold Disaster (Monkey)**, displayed in the central space of the exhibition, depicts an apocalyptic climate paradox – a monkey going up in flames while a snowstorm sweeps through a tropical forest. The monkey, a recurring image in Rosen's works, is a kind of self-portrait as well as an allusion to the monkey-painter which symbolize in western art tradition the medium of painting.

The title of the exhibition, **How to Hide Your Pains from Yourself**, is one of 24 titles featured in Rosen's work **The Standard Edition**, a collection of alternative title pages to those of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (1896-1939). As part of his practice, Rosen employs common genres and medium conventions; in this series, he focuses on book covers and turns them into his subject. The book-cover as an aesthetic format embodies the potential and the promise the cover unfolds. Rosen harnesses the ambivalence of contemporary psychology with respect to Freud's legacy in order to appropriate and deconstruct the titles so that they reflect his own life and the subjects that preoccupied him in his art. In a manner that recalls his alleged adaptation of Kafka for kids, here too he humorously enters into an intellectual dialogue with a revered cultural figure (the Standard Edition he purchased with great effort as a young student sits in his library to this day). The project includes two editions – one textual, in which the volume titles change, and the name of the author stays constant, and the other illustrated, in which the names of the authors are a host of fabricated identities, phonetic variations and anagrams of the name Roe Rosen. Some of the drawings echo earlier works, for instance silhouettes that allude to gouaches that look like paper cutouts from **Live and Die as Eva Braun** or anthropomorphic landscapes that are associated with the paintings of the fictive artist Justine Frank.²

The exhibition also features a new work (the fifth in total) in the **Funerals of Roe Rosen** series – a diptych of two circles that depicts a funeral from the viewpoint of the deceased while the transparent ground affords a glimpse of those who stand above his grave. The images and motifs in the series of funeral paintings constitute a kind of small-scale retrospective. The latest work in the series deals with the film **Kafka for Kids** (2017-2022). Characters from Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* – Mrs. Samsa, the sister Grete, and the cleaning lady bend over and peer at the ground, while the slimy traces of the insect Gregor form a puddle of green mucus. The diptych's second part, apparently empty, features a sky with two moons and a cloud that serves also as a smiling comic-book face. The funeral paintings, like many of Rosen's works, are characterized by an emotional duality – a strong sense of the macabre alongside a gay and powerful colorfulness; a humor and a joy of life bound up with deep and disturbing pain.

¹ The Hebrew edition of *Lucy is Sick (Lucy Holeh)* will be published this year by Pardes Publishing.

² *The Standard Edition*, 2016-2022 will be published as a book as part of a 2024 Roe Rosen retrospective in Kunstverein Hannover.