

Roe Rosen (b. 1963, Rehovot, Israel) has carved out a singular position in the arts with his cast of fictitious, part-fictitious, and real-life characters which, for over three decades now, have appeared across a variety of media, from gouaches to paintings to film, books, and installation.

“Those of you who heard of me, know that I have built my entire career on lies, scandals, obscene pictures, fake identities. I have pretended not to be myself. No more. It is urgent to do the right, difficult thing,” says the artist in his film *The Confessions of Roe Rosen* (2007), in which he is played by three illegal labor migrants. In *Two Women and a Man* (2005), on the other hand, Rosen appears in person, but as a fictitious female scholar delivering a television interview about Justine Frank, an obscure Surrealist painter who, in fact, never existed yet her works are found in art collections. Aside from creating a cinematic narrative, Rosen has developed Frank’s whole oeuvre of oil paintings and gouaches, complete with personal photographs and the controversial book she wrote (*Sweet Sweat*, Sternberg Press, 2009). Through her biography, Rosen speaks of an impossible past and imagines a different present. Poetic as they are, Rosen’s works draw upon the very extremes of human existence: life, death, but also sexuality, which is a frequent motif, deployed as one of the driving forces in his scenarios. Maxim Komar-Myshkin, another character brought to life by Rosen, is a Russian dissident artist and émigré. Obsessed with the thought of being inevitably killed on the orders of Vladimir Putin, Myshkin took his own life in 2011, leaving behind a series of gouaches conceived as a grim fairy tale—both a testimony to his own gripping paranoia and an ultimate act of retaliation—in which his nemesis is the victim of a delirious sequence of events as his unsatiated appetite for satisfaction blurs the borders between dream and reality.

As masterfully as he conjures up the roster of his characters, Rosen crafts layered narratives that feed off culture, politics and, inevitably, his own experience. His most recent film, *Kafka for Kids* (2022), which has been long in the making, takes the form of a pilot episode for a TV program for children. There, Franz Kafka’s short story *The Metamorphosis* is itself transformed into a psychedelic séance that draws out the superb simplicity of the writer’s idea of what it means to wake up one day as a cockroach, as well the political ramifications of such a predicament. No matter how close or distant his characters and references are, Rosen remains implicated in all of them. For *Lucy is Sick* (2020–2024), the artist created a coloring book for adults that is an account of dealing with an illness—something that is perhaps impossible to grasp solely from the use of dry, technical terms and which yearns to be filled out with personal content. For *The Gaza War Tattoos* (2024), the artist, similarly makes use of an oxymoronic language, just as he had been throughout his practice, to put in perspective the sense of safety and its lack.

For Rosen—with his background in philosophy, literature, and visual arts—humor is a tool that he has rehearsed and mastered for years. But laughter is only a side-effect of trespassing between the places, lands, and nations, between what constitutes the work of historians, the results of political actions and their impact, and what is the work of the imaginary. “I am Roe Rosen,” one of his three effigies further reveals in *Confessions*: “I was born in a small, dismal village in Israel, four years before 1967. My wonderful parents have bequeathed me a feeling heart; for them, it was the source of their felicity, for me, it was the foundation of all my misfortunes. Everything was painful, and the pains of others were even more unbearable than my own.”

*Roe Rosen. The Kafka Companion To Wellness*, spanning over a hundred gouaches, paintings and films of Roe Rosen, is his first major solo presentation in Germany in almost a decade, curated by Christoph Platz-Gallus and Krzysztof Kosciuczuk. It is accompanied by a publication of Rosen’s book *The Standard Edition*, began in 2016 and completed recently, published by Distanz Verlag and Kunstverein Hannover.