

Roe Rosen: Silly Sea, Sly Sky

07.05.26 — 20.06.26

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The current exhibition comprises of three bodies of work created over the past year. In the project space 'Rozy', located at the gallery's entrance, a series of black and white acrylic paintings on paper is presented. The series originates in a wall painting Rosen recently exhibited in a group exhibition at the Haus for Media Art (Formerly Edith-Russ-Haus) in Oldenburg, Germany, which confronted the Nazi past of the institution's benefactor. In this context, Rosen revisits the visual language of his 1990s project *Live and Die as Eva Braun*. The works depict scenes inspired by *Little Red Riding Hood*, alongside paintings of moons, each concealing a swastika - two hybridized with the facial features of Max and Moritz, and a third composed of trees associated with the style of Caspar David Friedrich. As in many of Rosen's works, this series interweaves motifs drawn from children's tales, macabre humor, and collective trauma.

In the main gallery space, oil paintings on canvas are presented. The five paintings entitled **Silly Sea** are structured around a logic of seemingly incorrect hanging, offering each work two possible display modes: in one, the horizon line is leveled and the sea stretches horizontally across the wall, but the frames hang at tilted angles; in the other, the frames are aligned "properly," yet the horizon is broken, and the sea "spills". This gesture, which treats the painted sea as actual liquid, responsive to the tilt of the frame, first appeared in Rosen's book *Lucy Is Sick* (2024). Through the clouds and their reflections in the water, figurative images emerge; the identification of forms in clouds is both a childlike and conspiratorial act - a recurring motif in Rosen's work (for example, in the landscapes of Justine Frank or in *Astrological Paranoia Paintings* by Maxim Komar-Myshkin). In the diptych **Sly Sky**, the phrases 'Help is Coming' and 'Not Today' appear in the clouds, evoking an almost inevitable reflection on the present reality in the region - across Gaza, Lebanon, and Israel. At the same time, these statements may be read as expressions of individual distress or as a philosophical stance - 'Not Today' as an inversion of 'carpe diem'.

The painting **A Zionist Golem**, the first in a series of **Silly Portraits**, began with the notion that two clouds suffice to render David Ben-Gurion's iconic tufts of hair. To these are added Moshe Dayan's eye patch and Golda Meir's facial features. The facial features rest upon an urn, a nod to Dayan's well-known interest in antiquities. The word **EMET** ('Truth') appears on the figure's forehead - through which the mythical Golem of Prague was brought to life - and which also appeared on the historical ballot slip of the Israeli Labor party (Ha'maarach).

In **Billionaires in Space**, the portrait takes the form of an Amazon cardboard parcel, with grotesque facial components including a phallic nose inspired by Jeff Bezos's *Blue Origin* spacecraft, stamped with the Tesla logo. The addition of a barcode as a Hitlerian mustache alludes to Elon Musk's infamous Nazi salute. The portrait **A Spiritual Swindler** is marked by elongated earlobes reminiscent of the Buddha; the vaginal wound of Christ appears on his forehead; and he wears a large kippah adorned with a Star of David - signifiers suggesting that his deception traverses religions and cultures.

These intractable oil paintings adopt a deliberately unruly logic: they are playful and irreverent, structured around an absurd internal principle, and resist adherence to the rules Rosen sets for himself - typically as part of an overarching conceptual, thematic, and stylistic framework.