

SLEEK

Berlin finally gets a taste of John Miller's 'Elixir of Immortality'

From a civil rights sit-in painting to a devilish Batman with an erected penis, 'An Elixir of Immortality' is a manifestation of the uncompromising eclecticism that embodies John Miller's forty-year artistic career—By Luka Terihaj

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Installation photo by Andrea Rossetti

If one residual impression is taken from John Miller's 'An Elixir of Immortality' exhibition it is that immortality is achieved through an uncompromising attitude of fearlessness. Miller refuses to conform to neat aesthetic categories as can be seen in the variety of artistic mediums on show at Schinkel Pavillon. The exhibition displays Miller's output from the 1980s up until the present day and whilst his work may feel polarising, it succeeds in being both flagrantly provocative and carrying conscious depth.

The unharmonious aesthetic of the Ohio-born artist's solo exhibition is visibly discordant—polyphony is given little chance to exist. The central element of the exhibition is an installation of monumental golden ruins. Entitled 'Mourning for a World of Rubbish', the ruins are coated in a tacky gold paintjob and appear totally bereft of connection to the painting depicting civil rights sit-ins placed behind it.



Untitled (1987), Acrylic on canvas. Courtesy Ringnier Collection, Zurich. Photo by Andrea Rossetti

However, beyond the jarring visual, there is potentially a socially conscious message underneath. The unflattering gold paint might suggest a delusion adopted by the western world regarding its own self-aggrandising image. Especially when social issues are rife and often left unaddressed as the sit-in painting alludes to. Irrespective of whether such a reading resonates with you, the unapologetic fearlessness in the exhibition's discordance remains.

To operate fearlessly in any field is certainly worthy of plaudits—but to do so in the art world is worthy of unique commendation. For many artists, gatekeepers can dictate to a large degree their exposure, financial success and career longevity. Such a structure can create environments of deep fear and angst. Many artists are forced to choose whether to pander to popular expectations or create freely and face the blunt blow of scrutiny that is likely to follow. In light of this dilemma, Miller chooses the latter, and the title of his show clarifies his stance—live fearlessly, and you'll live forever.

'An Elixir of Immortality' runs through till 13 December 2020 at Schinkel Pavillon.

Credits

Photography by Andrea Rossetti