

Guardini Stiftung in Berlin presents

## **FEDERICO SOLMI: *The Drunken Boat***

<b>Opening</b>	21 April 2023, 6–8 pm
<b>Exhibition</b>	24.4.–23.6.2023
<b>Artist Talk</b>	29.4. 5 pm, between Larissa Kikol and Federico Solmi (EN)
<b>Special hours</b>	28.–30.4. 11 am–7 pm (during Gallery Weekend Berlin)

Kornfeld Galerie Berlin and Galerie Anita Beckers (Frankfurt/Main) proudly present the exhibition “The Drunken Boat” by Italian-American multi-media artist Federico Solmi at the Guardini Galerie.

In Solmi’s work, painting and video art interact in surprising media harmony. Without the struggle about genres, and the competition between classical art techniques and digital technology, space emerges for the existing potential to unfold. 3-D- and video game technologies interact hand in hand with expressionist painting and reveal remarkable visions of the world that burn themselves into the beholders’ subconscious.

Curator Larissa Kukol: „What are fairytales if they don’t serve the goal of ascertaining truth? Federico’s art tells stories in a grotesque, carnivalesque setting. With balloons, bottles of alcohol, and riders, they question official American historiography. The curator Larry Ossei-Mensah speaks of Solmi’s “social surrealist approach.” Official history, as found in textbooks used in schools, was for a long time written by the victors, manipulating, lying, and furnished with false heroism. Atrocities like the genocide of the native Americans or false facts, like the ones propagated about the Iraq war, have been sugarcoated and presented as a victor’s narrative for too long. Books like *Lies My Teacher Told Me – Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* and *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn have strongly influenced Solmi. In the latter book, Zinn writes about the dominance of elites, class struggles, the invasion of white Europeans and the displacement of indigenous peoples. Federico Solmi tells new histories, tries to correct and get closer to the truth. To this end, he employs storytelling; he is a director, painter, dramaturge, stage and costume designer all at once. Solmi’s worlds captivate us with a unique satirical surreality. They are dreams, nightmares, daydreams, tragic, funny, frightening, festive, threatening. Federico Solmi’s art is in truth an art of narration. There is hardly anyone who can combine painting and VR as skillfully as he does.

His figures wear exaggerated costumes, they move slowly and like puppets, their bodies seem to swing, gather momentum, and then circle back. Their skin does not wear any theater makeup, but paint brush gestures; their faces are not masks, but painting. Sometimes they are drunk, sometimes lost. Like in expressionist films, surroundings and figures merge into a Gesamtkunstwerk. Reality is represented through alienation. Solmi’s surrealism creates exactly the goosebump horror that doesn’t come from the front, but from the side—little fingertips that touch you suddenly and make your body hair stand up. That there is truth in this is revealed slowly, it is first sensed, and then becomes a certainty, when the discomfort conquers the stomach and victoriously plants its flag there. Leaders and presidents wave and present themselves, they prance about and in so doing reveal themselves as virtual hollow bodies that were enveloped in paint. In their pride they make fools of themselves, authorities lose their reputation. The more power they believe they have, the more they become a satirical questioning of their own existence.

Their smiles are grotesque grimaces, and in all the colorful festiveness, the horror resonates in the rhythmic military marches. That which looks like official ceremonies of state exhausts itself in an after-party delirium in which the supposed heroes fall. Their mechanic radius of movement becomes a treadmill.

Painterly traces acquire in Solmi's Gesamtkunstworlds new meanings. Speckles and spots become lights, reflections, or seeming showers of confetti. Mouths painted expressionistically red become evil clown masks. Examples of fantastical uncanniness like in the works of Francisco José de Goya come to mind, but also films like *Nosferatu: A Symphonie of Horror* or *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, all the way to the paintings by George Grosz. But with Federico Solmi, a lot seems initially like comedy. What seems cheerful always dissolves, for example through the colors of skin that never stop moving. The faces are drawn, and colors and gestures are like scars running through them, they appear and then disappear again. The changing face renders the figure's personality brittle. Who is it, and who or what is behind it?

In his pure paintings, Federico Solmi also translates the digital, geometrical frameworks used to construct volume and bodies into pastel and ink compositions, the bright lines shine like star chains or feathers, they blend almost dance-like into their new analogue existence. Here, Benjamin Franklin and George Washington ride ghost-like through nowhere. There is no environment, the video worlds are hidden, the white leaders ride into nothingness.

Those who engage with Solmi's works for a while will never be able to watch a state performance in an unbiased way. In our mind, the brush blows flare up on the presidents' cheeks, and then, in a surprising moment, the corners of the mouths are drawn out into red rivers. Federico Solmi's schemes of the world merge in their surreal paintings not just with video technology, but also with the images that we consume through the media. Ultimately, not just the one, but every reality becomes much more questionable.“

The Guardini Stiftung e.V. was established in 1987 to contribute to the cultural dialogue between art, science and faith from a Christian perspective. In doing so, it follows its namesake, the religious philosopher and theologian Romano Guardini, who taught in Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s until his removal from office by the National Socialists.

Contemporary visual art is a focal point of the Guardini Foundation's program of events. Since October 2000, the gallery spaces in the immediate vicinity of the Martin-Gropius-Bau on Askanischer Platz in Berlin-Kreuzberg have been used for this purpose. On 360 sqm the Guardini Gallery hosts group and solo exhibitions, readings, lectures, concerts and colloquia.

FEDERICO SOLMI: *The Drunken Boat*  
Guardini Stiftung e.V.  
Askanischer Platz 4  
10963 Berlin, Germany

[www.guardini.de](http://www.guardini.de)

Federico Solmi on Instagram @federico\_solmi  
#FedericoSolmi

Hours: Mon–Fri, 1 pm–6 pm  
The exhibition is closed on\_  
12.5., 18.5. (Ascension Day),  
29.5. (Pentecost) and 15.6.

Phone: +49 30 217358-0

Press  
Hans Krestel  
0049 177–6464856  
[hans\\_krestel@gmx.de](mailto:hans_krestel@gmx.de)

