

Peter Schweri & Grégory Sugnaux – Mental Mask
Curated with Marco Antonini

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The exhibition brings together works by two Swiss artists that will never have a chance to meet but, we'd like to think, would have both been intrigued by each other's practice. Perhaps, even masterminded this collaboration on their own terms, if given space and time.

Gregory Sugnaux (*1989); his psychotic, trembling portraits. His vivid close ups on this or that oddity, oddly painted, liquid, eclectic, electric. Nothing is what it seems around them. The unpinnable Peter Schweri (1939 – 2016); his daring, artists' artist persona, diffracted everywhere. Here, on drawings that we'd love to flaunt as salvaged from a ghost ship's treasure trove.

Encountering Peter Schweri's early works felt like pure discovery: A scattering of torn pages, inked and painted so beautifully, fragile impressions of mental states, encounters, dreams perhaps. 'Mental masks' abound in Schweri's 60's and 70's work – a period the artist was involved in the art and literary scene that developed in the village of Carona, Ticino. Brick and mortar humanoid figures, neurotic, trippy eyed mickeys, lizards in love, the indescribable, the flash in the pan, the diamond in the rough. None of this is a character, it's all surface, pages ready to be (figuratively) torn, shaped, cut and worn like a mask. The eye area is seldomly depicted – perhaps pointing to his later loss of eyesight. Drawings you feel over and under your skin. Other decades brought forth different ways of working in him: concrete geometries, pioneering software art, performance, music... other states of mind, other stories to unravel.

Across the room and around the corner, Gregory Sugnaux's paintings summon cartoonish figures and found digital imagery that seem to deal with concealment, impersonation, travesty. Paintings characterized by a gloomy playfulness, ignoring discursive blinkers: They feel occult in the most etymological of the senses, their core meaning remains "Occultato" (Hidden) behind their earnest obliquity. Several of the works make a point of cropping the whole world out of the picture, zooming into a frenzy, and filling themselves to the edge of the stretchers with disturbing and shifting moods. The surfaces are twitchy with invisible color strings, impastos, palettes and techniques shifting from painting to painting, at conflict with and within themselves, uninterested in pleasing.

Here, too, you would need to wear and peek through the works rather than just "Look" at them. Just like in Peter Schweri's case, things are never what they portray. You are the mask of something that's looking back at you, far behind the wall. MA

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Grégory Sugnaux (b. 1989) lives and works in Fribourg. In extracting familiar images from existing pictorial codes, his work is generally concerned with the status of the image through the mediation of exhibition and painting. With curation alongside his artistic practice, Sugnaux also investigates the conditions of the exhibition in varying approaches. From 2016 to 2020, he was co-curator of the project space WallRiss in Fribourg and since 2017 co-curator of Backslash Festival in Zürich. In 2015, he received the Kiefer Hablitzel | Göhner Art Prize and was a finalist in the 2020 Swiss Art Awards. Recent exhibitions include "Into The Wolf's Mouth", Lateral Roma, 2023; "Data Romance" at Château de Gruyères (2022), "Spring Equinox" at suns.works, Zürich 2022; "La réforme de Pooky", Friart Kunsthalle Fribourg, 2022, "heute denken, morgen fertig" at Display, Berlin (2020), and "Définitif, donc provisoire" at Kunsthalle Friart in 2019.

Peter Schweri (1939 – 2016) was a Swiss artist, painter, illustrator, composer and computer art pioneer. First working in film and graphic design, he later became part of the artist commune in Carona (Ticino), where he lived alongside David Weiss and Anton Bruhin, producing a host of fascinatingly idiosyncratic drawings. During the 1980's he became known for his finely executed hard-edge paintings, later turning into digital compositions, and is today also considered a representative of the Zürich concrete-constructive movement. Recent exhibitions include «Keine Zeit – Kunst aus Zürich», Helmhaus Zürich, 2017; «CARONA» Weiss Falk, Basel 2018, "Group Exhibition" at Fabbrica Culturale Baviera, Giornico, 2021.