

Press Release

Robert Elfgen

Higgs-Boson

April 28–July 3, 2021

Sprüth Magers Window, Berlin

Sprüth Magers

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to announce *Higgs-Boson*, a project showcasing new works by Robert Elfgen. It is the first presentation at Sprüth Magers *Window*, a new format that takes the art out of the gallery space and places it in a more domestic environment with wood-paneled walls, while also offering the chance to experience the exhibition from the street. Elfgen's mystical paintings of landscapes and mythical creatures as well as objects from his studio transform *Window* into a "Wunderkammer", a spatial work of art that addresses man's relationship to the world and our existence in its entity.

The exhibition title refers to the Higgs boson, an elementary particle detected just a few years ago using complex experiments. Also known as the "God particle," it only becomes visible for a fleeting moment before it breaks down and disappears. Its discovery was a watershed moment in the field of elementary physics, as the particle had long been one of the last, unknown building blocks of matter. It is closely tied to the Big Bang and is key to understanding how mass materializes.

Elfgen's new works have a meaningful connection with the title. They are reminiscent of 19th-century Romantic landscapes in which the artists evoked a kind of painting that sought to depict the divine in the earthly – and with it, the unseen in the seen. Yet a closer look at Elfgen's new paintings reveals that they are abstractions composed of various, interacting color gradients. In this way, he uses color to manifest nature. He applies spray paint with accents of ink; the ink introduces an element of chance to his creative process, as the interaction of these media with the surface can only be controlled up to a certain point. Wood grain visible through the color gives the works a highly tactile, painterly ductus; in allowing it to show, Elfgen's works reveal an otherwise concealed element just outside of the immediately visible. The material becomes the substantial creative moment of the work and part of its motif in the form of clouds in the sky or waves on the water. The images materialize. Metallic particles in the spray paint add a shiny shimmer to the surfaces and constitute yet another Higgs boson reference, as the particle also emits a split-second, visible glow just before breaking down.

New abstract landscape paintings are joined by other works by Elfgen. They show figurative elements and found objects from nature, such as animals and ferns, or combine them in an atmospherically-charged form of collage. The main subject of his oeuvre – the relationship between humans and nature – is thus taken up and expanded, often on a metaphysical level. Depicted animals recall fantastic mythical creatures, further underscoring the images' mystical character. Elfgen's subject matter and materials create a cosmos in which nature and civilization intertwine. Together they show us the invisible in the visible, and enable us to see the world in a subtle, new light.

Robert Elfgen (*1972, Wesseling) lives and works in Cologne. Elfgen first studied with John Armleder at the Akademie der Künste Braunschweig before transferring to Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he studied as a master pupil of Rosemarie Trockel. He was awarded the Atelierstipendium, Kölnischer Kunstverein and Imhoff-Stiftung, Cologne (2004); the Förderpreis des Landes NRW für junge Künstlerinnen und Künstler (2007), and the Grafikpreis des Landes NRW (2009). Important solo exhibitions include Strandspaziergang, Leopold-Hoesch-Museum, Dueren (2016); Hören was zu sehen, Oldenburger Kunstverein (2015); des bien ich, Sprüth Magers Cologne (2008); expedition, westlondonprojects, London (2006) and 1+1=3 Elfgen-Technik, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn (2005). Important group exhibitions include Berlin Edition, Museum of Now, Berlin (2019); Spargelmatinee, Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (2017); Paperworlds, me Collectors Room Berlin (2014); Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg (2013–14); Plaisirs du Jardin, Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen (2012), and Paul Thek: Works in the Context of Today's Contemporary Art at ZKM Karlsruhe and the Falckenberg Collection, Hamburg (2007–08).

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