



LUST FOR LIFE

Eli Content

October 17 - November 14 2020

Ringmaster or Grim Reaper? Penguin or judge? When we're faced with Eli Content's figure cut from newspaper and painted black, the associations dart back and forth. His bright red bow tie and buttons give him a cheerful look, while his awkward posture and outstretched arms instantly arouse sympathy. But suddenly the image flips. His face is frightening: the eyes and mouth exist only by way of their absence, as gaping holes in the paper. While that simplicity is a strength, there is also something sinister and vulnerable about it.

When Eli Content (Switzerland, 1943) was slowly recovering from a severe illness in January 2020, this figure was his first creation. Reading or listening proved to be too strenuous an effort, but this image had to be made. And then came others: the 'ringmaster' was given guards, similarly basic and dark voodoo-like creatures, who strike terror in our hearts but, occasionally, also seem to smile at us with eyes that haven't seen anything and a mouth that hasn't spoken words in a long time. Not until these figures came into the world was Content able to move on. That's when his hands began giving shape to a motley and brightly hued collection: even more figures, masks and totem-like images. As if he was cutting his way back to life with each work.



Robert Zandvliet has made a selection of work from this new series and compiled a stunning presentation titled *Lust for Life*. In this eruption of energy, craziness and playfulness attest to a primal and infectious will to live. An outburst of 'simply making beautiful things' has resulted in uncomplicated images, in which a nearly primitive aesthetic quality is no formula but rather an unavoidable consequence. This is evident not only from the large collection of masks, – a form pre-eminently suited to an artist who has little concern for the visible outside world – but also from the shady characters at that start of this series.

Content combined the 'ringmaster' with a series of bile-yellow faces that now swarm around it. Zandvliet reproduced this combination in his presentation, thereby immediately creating a kind of narrative. We could for instance see the faces, alternately comical and cruel, as little angels and devils who wish to influence the 'ringmaster's' judgment. But these could also be an expression of the different voices in a mind, or the spirit leaving the body.

From that point of view, the opposite wall teems with life. In big cardboard figures Content depicted a series of archetypal creators: a poet, composed of letters of the alphabet; a musician who is a striking cubist composite of Chet Baker and Charlie Parker; but also a 'modern artist' and a woman. Among them a circus performer is balancing jauntily but warily on a ball – as though the art of living and the pleasure of creating come together in this single image.

'Creating,' Content once said in an interview, 'is a way of healing the troubled universe.' But for Content creating is, at the same time, an undeniable existential condition in which his lust for life is rooted.

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