

RETREAT

BY ERIK SCHMIDT

18.09 — 30.10.2022

KUNSTRAUM

POTSDAM | WASCHHAUS

Text by Silvio Saraceno

Kunstraum Potsdam | Waschhaus is pleased to host *Retreat*, Erik Schmidt's latest solo show, which transforms the gallery space into his own elusive paradise.

The creative exploration of the polyhedric German painter, born in 1968, has often been shaped by the narratives of his travel experiences and his desire to illustrate what he perceives by the encounter with foreign cultures.

The exhibition introduces us to a six-week trip he made last spring to Sri Lanka, across the villages surrounding Colombo, the capital city where mass protests began in March 2022 and spread all over the country. Protests of people who – thirteen years after the end of a long civil war – are still recovering and are now struggling with economic crisis, including power cuts and shortages of basics such as fuel, food and medicines.

With *No Crisis*, a drawing series based on pictures taken while wandering the streets, Schmidt individuates characters from the flow of people, absorbed in their life rhythms or activities, and portrays them on the pages of newspapers from which he received daily national news updates. The result is an extremely expressive juxtaposition of thick strokes that offers a genuine insight into the local community, despite the limited colour range and the humidity of the area.

The artist's optical filtering of the world is manifest in *Palm Bombs*, large-scale paintings based on photographs of palms captured during the residency at One World Foundation, first printed on canvas and then overpainted in his studio. Schmidt's perspective gives the spectator a bottom-up view of the palm trees, which is usually forbidden in order to prevent the harm of falling coconuts. Impasto technique is here applied with an aggressive streak and paint reaches a palpable sculptural aspect, transforming into pure, vibrant, disturbing colour. Overwhelmed by such a politically connoted environment, even the painter's fascinated gaze gets affected. Nature itself turns into a war zone through his brushstrokes: fruits thus become bombs, palm leaves are their explosion rays.

What remains of these explosions – fallen from the same trees – is lying on the ground of the space, resembling weapons and hand grenades. More newspaper pages lie on a hanger, overwritten with keywords, as if desperately trying to erase the news that one is forced to read. The expectation of the *Palm House* being a paradise fails in its aim and brings us back to the violent failure of civilisation.

The vain search for shelter is also echoed in the two videos *Fine* and *Inizio*, thematically related to the paintings, although set in a different geographical and temporal context. In this last part of the exhibition, the scenario shifts from tangible reality to Schmidt's own inner dimension, paradise lost where the illusion of sanctuary is unachievable once again. A kind of self-exploration through guilt and catharsis, undoubtedly germinated from the unrestlessness of his life journey, which finally leads to a more conscious realisation that there is no longer any place on Earth for retreat.

Retreat is on view from 18 September to 30 October 2022, Wednesday to Sunday, 1pm - 6pm.