

Robert Elfgén's paintings, collages, sculptures and installations are affected by an associative handling of the materials the artist uses. Drawing upon the symbolic power of imagery, he creates unstable allegories that challenge the fixed nature of representation. For seemingly surrealistic collages, Elfgén combines found and reworked copies of photographs, fabrics, and paintings, developing visual interpretations of everyday life. In these stage-like constellations, humans and their contexts appear to be focused on the systems and rituals that constitute society. At no time do these intimate settings appear unambiguous, nor are they static: Elfgén's peculiar and engaging language ensures that they remain floating; a disconcerting quality that evokes instability and separation.

In the large assemblages that Elfgén has started to produce in recent years, inner disquiet has escalated into a whirring cacophony of noise. Although reality is still perceptible through the physical presence of collected objects, these works have given up their readability for the realisation of the polyphony of their various elements. Found traffic signs, broken fence posts, remnants of discarded mobile homes, surf sails and parasols interact with Elfgén's paintings, provoking an oscillation between past and present, concrete and abstract, but also between the whole and the detail. Paintings of flora and fauna refer to the artist's roots in rural West Germany, but they are also components of these complex installations. Elfgén's persistent referencing of nature and his native landscape in his work is a recurring and important aspect of his practice.

Elfgén's technically innovative bricolage-art is of course not devoid of art-historical reference. His associative treatment of 'objets trouvés' recalls Marcel Duchamp; his strict conceptual logic is reminiscent of Rosemarie Trockel, who taught his masterclass. Clear allusions to the Romantic pictorial language of painters such as William Turner or Caspar David Friedrich, along with traces of a laconicism from Surrealism and Pop Art can also be identified in his work. All this notwithstanding, Elfgén's artisanal investigations have led him to achieve something attained by only a few artists – the creation of an utterly personal, unique cosmos. This cosmos opens up a series of spaces that demand biographical, phenomenological, and psychoanalytical interpretations. It is a cosmos in which nature and civilization merge into each other: one which enables the viewer to see the world in a new and subtle manner.

Under the title *Nachen* Elfgén will exclusively present a series of landscape paintings for Galerie Isa. In some, he worked actual plants into the paintings, carefully pressing them onto the surface, thereby adding colours, shades and shadows that affect a deepening of the paintings' perspectives. The twilight hues of these works lend them a mysterious, almost mystic character. In contrast, the other landscape paintings seem to dissolve into pure abstraction. Only a thin horizon line structures the space where highly diluted colours blend together and the grains of the wood backgrounds show through, suggesting formations of clouds, tree lines, and ocean waves. The exhibition

title Elfgen has chosen introduces an additional and poetic reading of this ensemble. 'Nachen' denotes a flat, compact boat favoured by fishermen or used as a ferry. This simple vessel is propelled by rowing or punting - it does not move fast - and has come to be symbolic of tranquility and one-ness with nature in landscape painting.

Robert Elfgen was born in 1972 in Wesseling am Rhein, Germany. He lives and works in Cologne. Elfgen studied Fine Art at the University of Fine Arts in Braunschweig under the renowned Swiss artist, John Armleder before transferring to the National Academy of Arts in Düsseldorf, where he completed his education and was awarded "Meisterschüler" (master scholar) of Rosemarie Trockel, the internationally acclaimed German artist and senior professor at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. In 2016 Elfgen was the recipient of the Peill Grant from the Leopold Hoesch Museum in Düren, where he opened his major institutional show in September 2016.