

Manuel Tozzi
was immer war ist

Opening: January 24, 2025, 18:00 – 21:00
 Exhibition: January 25 – February 08, 2025
 Curator: Niklas Koschel
 Mariannenstrasse 33, 10999 Berlin

In *was immer war ist*, Manuel Tozzi presents an ambiguous corpus of works of diverse varieties. In three loose chapters, the artist, who works in Berlin and Salzburg, seeks insights into the reciprocal interweaving of time, information and identity. The interlinking of the individual works aims to examine traditional image systems and innovations in media technology. Tozzi uses various methods of technical image production to create a loose ensemble that explores the relationship between human, machine and message. Central to his work are fragile constructions of mythologized knowledge, personal memories and time-based ideas of the world.

The focus on time as a complex notion that is subjected to different ideas runs through the rooms of the exhibition. Divided into three sections, Tozzi places the phenomenon in the perspectives of time as a point, a line and a cycle.

The life-size starting point is the work *einsteinzeitmensch* (2024). The chrome-colored, naked figure with Albert Einstein's head evokes the aesthetics of perfectly shaped industrial products through its flawless, reflective surface. In its shimmering, smooth surface, the sculpture distances itself, dematerializes and yet materializes the surrounding space through the various reflections and refractions of light. The scientist became world-famous with his lecture on the special theory of relativity published in 1905, defining the dependence of distances and durations on the states of motion of their viewers. Einstein is regarded as a central scientific personality, not only of the 20th century, and is also canonized as a veritable cult figure. Tozzi explicitly considers Einstein's complex theory of the fundamental principles not only as part of an academic physical discourse, but also explores its mechanisms as a popular scientific part of a pop culture: "I am interested in the question of how scientific findings influence our everyday lives, as they often take a long time to be accepted by society."

From the very beginning, the concept of time has been essential to the medium of sculpture. It asserts duration and defines a moment which lies somewhere between a former not-anymore and a yet-not-to-be. The aspect of time that is so relevant is also made clear in the gesture of Einstein, who looks at his wrist as if he wants to look at the watch, which, however, is not there. The point in time seems to have been lost, the time – at least from a popular-scientific point of view – relativized.

The three works generated by a drawing robot each deal with the punctual relationship to space. Tozzi examines the point both in terms of its formal motivic ability, its metaphorical interpretation and its mathematical constructivism. *looking up at the stars* (2024) initially explores the vastness of space and a possible diversity of the universe in an almost cheesy star motif in a consciously popular iconic form. The artist used a profane Reddit quote as a starting point: "looking up at the stars always reminds me how small they are just dots who cares I am enormous". Through countless plotted dots, the image motif clusters into text, initiates meaning and addresses a message to the reader that originates from the online platform, which is known as a social news aggregator.

Anything but small and modest, an imaginative alter ego looking at the stars denies an infinite expanse its infinite greatness. The fascination of gazing at the sky is largely relativized by the banal-sounding statement – the imagined self in the sentence is placed at the center of a world in a central-perspective manner.

The Reddit thread, mechanically turned into an image, refers not only to the formal, punctual conditions of its creation, but also to paradoxical processes of radical isolation and self-centeredness on the net. Individual gestures and statements accumulate here, as in the image motif, to form dialogic communities. In digital spaces designed as communal, such as online community forums, blatant individualism can reach the limits of the proportionality of collectivity and also give rise to processes of relativization of factual truth.

While Tozzi deliberately gives the executing machine little freedom in the larger plotter work, in the explosion motifs he primarily "only" establishes the logic under which the algorithm constructs imagery through iterations, which is finally realized by the artist's selection. Here he explicitly poses questions about his authorship and the condition of machine-based image creation processes.

As the basis for *@%#!* and *@!#%* (both 2025), which freeze a change of status as an image and thus channel the moment as a point, Tozzi considers the mathematics behind the central perspective. It constructs the center of the picture, running towards

a point or taking it as its starting point. In this way, the explosive formations expand from the center into the viewer's field of vision. This movement is countered by fine splashes of paint, which the artist subsequently blows onto the still unfinished motif. In the main motif the machine-made work simulates a movement out of the picture, while Tozzi's personal hand performs a movement into the picture: The minimal painterly action of the artist thus counters the executing activity of the machine.

In the group of works *Self-Portrait as Centaurus (1-5)* (2023-ongoing), which, based on the mythological representation of the Centauri, deal with the exaggerations of the body defined as male, Tozzi uses the model of his own body to negotiate the interactions between physical strength and mental lethargy. Digitally reconstructing and modifying his own body, he questions the relationship between body and model and places his artistic practice in relation to classical ideas of sculpture. The mythologized depiction of muscular, warlike male bodies, which are an expression of dynamism, strength but also violence, is motivationally paralysed here. They crouch on the ground, appearing tired, introverted, even remorseful.

Aspects of mythical narration and the associated concepts of time as a linear process are also continued in the torch motif of the work *Accessoire (bewitched)* (2024). In close reference to Hans Baldung Grien's peculiar copperplate engraving *The Bewitched Stablehand* (c. 1534), Tozzi decontextualizes the individual motif of the torch and isolates it as a veritable icon. The motif refers to aspects of a straight-line perception of time, especially as there is a long tradition of calculating time based on the burning of material. In Baldung Grien's enigmatic engraving, the torchbearer is usually interpreted as a witch, although it remains unclear what relationship she has to the stableman. Is she a source of danger? Is she responsible for the man lying injured on the ground? In an almost enlightening spirit, Tozzi interprets the torch as a sign of knowledge, knowledge transfer and, above all, knowledge transportation, as it was also essential for the medium of copperplate engravings. Themes of authorship also draw historical links between this tradition of engravings and prints as well as plotter drawings. In addition, the motif explicitly addresses issues relating to the reproduction, duplication and processing of information through printmaking.

The video work *Sticky Gloves* (2023), which is conceived as a continuous loop, is characterized by its reference to Tozzi's personal memories. Identity and self-constitution are explored here in a steady, ever-continuous reference back to personal history. The artist deals with the consequences of images that shape our lives. Through combinations of improvised metaphors, Tozzi examines how images of the absent are recreated, constructed and passed on through narratives and memories. In the work, reality and fiction blur into an unusual narrative. Central to this is the memory of a grandfather who was "never there". Instead of following linear narratives, the story, like memories, is unfinished in terms of space and time. Here and there it fades, only to be propelled anew the next moment by a distorted Elvis Presley ballad or the movements of an animated key. The cellar hole, in which Tozzi's poetic search for the temporality and reality of memory begins, seems to stand for a place of absence like a heterotopia. Striking motifs of white gloves as well as the comic and animated film aesthetic, which for the artist represent lasting impressions from childhood as traces left behind in the search for identity, offer space to interweave with the viewer's personal emotional world.

Text: Niklas Koschel

Manuel Tozzi (born 1994 in Salzburg, Austria) works in Berlin and Salzburg. He is a visual artist who makes kinetic sculptures, computer animations and drawings using time-based media. In 2020, Tozzi graduated with a BFA in Film and Animation from the Berliner Technischen Kunsthochschule. In the same year, he gave a lecture on digital fashion design at the Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences. He is currently studying sculpture at the Kunsthochschule Berlin Weißensee. His recent group exhibitions have been at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Kunstverein Salzburg, the Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich and the Eigenheim Galerie Berlin. In October 2022, his first solo exhibition „Tanuel Mozzi“ was on display at Eboran Gallery in Salzburg, Austria. He has been artist in residence at the Salzburg Summer Academy and the Kara Agora Art and Research Center.