

# C H A R I M

Julian Göthe

*Sala dei Giganti*

19.03 - 09.05.2025

For his first solo exhibition at Charim Galerie, Julian Göthe presents new plaster reliefs, drawings, collages, rope wall friezes, and a new sculpture.

The title refers to one of the starting points of the exhibition: the *Sala dei Giganti* is one of twenty-seven rooms in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua. Designed and built between 1525 and 1536 as a pleasure palace by Giulio Romano for the Count of Mantua, Federico II Gonzaga, the Mannerist palazzo bears a tension. On the one hand, it was built as a representation of the Count's authority and power; on the other, it played with their deconstruction by overthrowing the prevailing architectural and artistic systems of order, traditions and styles. Mannerist artists built on the technical and thematic achievements of the Renaissance and developed them further, deliberately disrupting and confusing the previously prevailing rules. The *Sala dei Giganti* forms a circular panorama in which illusionistic, floor-to-ceiling frescoes depict giants in battle with the gods. The giants are clearly losing, and the viewers find themselves on the same level as the giants—today, one can only imagine what effect the monstrous worlds of the illusionistic depictions must have had on the guests of the palazzo. Intimidating, yes. But perhaps also exciting: an attempt at revolt.

In his introduction to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Gautier describes *the style of decadence: a style that is ingenious, complicated, learned, full of shades of meaning and research, always pushing further the limits of language ... the language of the later Roman empire, already mottled with greenness of decomposition ... the inevitable and fatal idiom of peoples and civilizations where factious life has replaced the natural life and developed in man unknown wants.*<sup>1</sup>

In *Sala dei Giganti* Julian Göthe continues to investigate systems and languages of representation being *mottled with greenness of decomposition*. It is this tension of opposites: an order failing to preserve aesthetic, political and social rules, a crumbling system of codes and traditions. In what sense styles convey, in a broader sense, the notion of 'manners of thinking', whether they can be periodized, and, if so, what are the ideological motivations, are all subjects of Göthe's practice.

The white plaster reliefs emerge from the walls like repeatedly folded pages of paper, moving from flatness to three-dimensionality. In Deleuze's *The Fold* I read: *The problem is not how to finish a fold, but how to continue it, to have it go through the ceiling, how to bring it to infinity. It is not only because the fold affects all materials that it thus becomes expressive matter, with different scales, speeds, and different vectors (mountains and waters, papers, fabrics, living tissues, the brain), but especially because it determines and materializes Form. It produces a form of expression, a Gestaltung, the genetic element or infinite line of inflection, the curve with a unique variable.*<sup>2</sup>

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1 Michael Bracewell, in: Oscar Wilde: The Critic as Artist, David Zwirner Books, New York 2019, p.16.

2 Deleuze, Gilles: Leibniz and the Baroque, The Athlone Press, London 1993, p. 34.

The folds in the exhibition continue as a scenography of black ropes on the walls of the gallery– Göthe almost succeeds in making them go through the ceiling. The French word for fold is *le pli*, which immediately links *to explicate/to make explicit* with the process of folding and unfolding. The attempt of the fold taken to infinity can be understood as a gathering of supposedly separate entities. Styles from different periods and stylistic expressions fold into each other, even if they seem contradictory. Göthe calls into question the rationale of periodization by folding differentiating sensibilities into each other.

Traces of the *Fall of the Giants* can be recognized in the drawings: bursting columns and ornamental winds or clouds collide; a battle between soft and hard objects unfolds. Similarly, the collages featuring images from gay porn are covered with sharp black shapes that conceal the men's genitals at their highest point of tension. One can witness the moment shortly before ejaculation, before the climax and subsequent deflation: turning from hard to soft. But Göthe only allows us to witness this supposedly intimate experience by showing the men's distorted facial expressions. A rather comical appearance that evokes the somewhat uncomfortable thought of one's own uncontrollable expression at the moment of greatest pleasure.

The sculpture *I can hear you* is one of Julian's monumental pointy, angular sculptures. Borrowing the title from a title on Colin Newman's album *Commercial Suicide*, it appears as a comic-serious figure, staged in fluorescent light, whose intensions are not quite clear. Standing on pointed legs, it needs support on the uneven gallery floor. Height-adjustable swivel threads balance the tragical-sinister giant made of perforated sheet metal and allow it to maintain a straight posture. The German word for *posture* is *Haltung*. *Haltung* is translated as *attitude*, but *halten* also means *to hold*. There is a bodily dimension to the word, a supportive one. To have a *Haltung* could mean that to be able to hold something, one also needs to be held.

I recently met someone again who once played an important role in my life. Looking back, I realize how harmful we were to each other. I surrendered myself to this person, allowed myself to be hurt and then bathed in the pain inflicted on me. Back with friends later that evening, I allowed memories to surface. I remembered loving messages in the mornings; expressions of love and affection, encouragement and interest. But which was true? Can a relationship be abusive *and* loving? Lying awake at 3 am I wanted to understand, to know, to *make it right*. Thinking about it now, I realize: perhaps this isn't possible. What if the task lies in the *Aushalten*–another German word in which *Haltung/Halten* appears– the enduring of the ambiguities of human relationships. It seems easier to see something as thoroughly bad and broken in order to be able to wipe it out of one's life. Or to elevate something to the unreal in order to never have to let it go. What about the in-between, the ungraspable? The challenge is *to hold* it; to develop an attitude/a *Haltung* towards it.

In Julian's work I recognize the tension that resides in holding (onto) something, in holding something together, in withstanding, enduring, bearing. What exactly? Contradictions, uncertainties, emotional bewilderments, disorder, ... And in that holding on, a *Haltung*–an attitude, a stance, manifests.

- Inga Charlotte Thiele