

Karl Haendel

Praise Berlin

Opening: 17 September 2022

Exhibition: 17 September – 22 October 2022

WENTRUP is pleased to present "Praise Berlin," our third solo exhibition with Los Angeles based artist Karl Haendel. This new body of work focuses on contemporary religious diversity and practice in Berlin and is following the project "Praise New York" which took place in spring at Mitchell-Innes & Nash Gallery in New York. In a series of large-scale, realistic drawings depicting the hands of some of the city's most inspiring Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish or Muslim leaders, Haendel pays homage to a diverse group of pastors, imams, rabbis and priests. As much this project is about religious diversity, it is also about ethnic and racial diversity. Berlin is growing more diverse as immigrants arrive. Besides its Catholic and protestant residents, there is large Muslim population, growing communities of Buddhists and Hindus, and a small but vibrant community of Jews. Highlighting how these communities of believers are vibrant, welcoming, and tolerant, the artist hopes to provide space for viewers to reassess their own systems of belief, embrace complexity, and expand their acceptance.

In the past two years I have been exploring the idea of group portraiture through the representation of hands. It is a novel way to make a portrait, allowing people to express themselves with gesture and nuance, but free from the tropes and standards of beauty associated with traditional representational portraiture. And in a time of pandemic when touching isn't allowed, representing the hand seems only more interesting to me. The hands of religious leaders, as they pray or perform blessings or rituals, are filled with spiritual resonance, further compelling my interest in a time when faith is in short supply. And art across culture and time, from the hands of saints in Byzantine mosaics, to Buddha's gestures in bronze sculpture, through to the mudras in Hindu iconography, have been filled with depictions of hands. This project continues that tradition, but with an emphasis on interfaith dialog and diversity. (Karl Haendel)

To make the work, the artist met with each leader in their house of worship, to talk about their faith, the history of their congregation in the city and to take reference photos of their hands. Back at his studio, Haendel digitally manipulated these photos to create new and often physically impossible hand compositions—contemporary reinterpretations of ritualistic hand gestures found in imagery across art history. But the digital affect is left imperceptibly visible (the same hand holding itself or a hand with too few or too many fingers), reminding us that these mystical and uncanny appendages are of the present. With these digital renderings used for reference, Haendel drew each hand portrait in pencil on paper, slowly and meticulously, at very large scale. In doing so, the artist uses his hand and labor to honor each leader's labor, be it intellectual or as service to their community, as a kind of homage, expanding the definition of drawing to include ritual, meditation, and service.

About the artist

Karl Haendel (*1976 in New York) lives and works in Los Angeles.

He was part of the Biennial of the Americas (2015); Whitney Biennial (2014); the 12th Biennale de Lyon (2013) and Prospect 2, New Orleans (2011).

He had solo exhibitions at LAXArt in Los Angeles; the Box at the Wexner Center for the Arts in Columbus and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Los Angeles. Haendel has been included in group exhibitions at institutions including the FLAG Art Foundation, New York; Aspen Art Museum, Aspen; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Drawing Center, New York; New Museum, New York; Astrup Fearnley Museum, Oslo; Muse d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, Nizza; Serpentine Gallery, London; Herning Museum of Contemporary Art; Herning; Kunsthalle Bielefeld and Palais Populaire, Berlin.

His artworks are in the public collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway; Deutsche Bank Collection, Frankfurt; Guggenheim Museum, New York; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris / San Francisco; Kunsthalle Bielefeld; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museo d'arte della Svizzera italiana, Lugano; Sammlung Wemhöner, Berlin; Perez Art Museum, Miami; Philbrook Museum of Art, Tulsa; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

About the Participants

The artist is grateful to his subjects and collaborators for their participation in „Praise Berlin“, including:

Imam Seyran Ates of the Ibn Rudsch-Goethe Mosque in Alt-Moabit

Bhante Pelane Dhammakusala of Das Buddhistisches Haus in Frohnau

Pastor Jasmin El-Manhy of the Evangelischer Kirchenkreis Neukölln

Father Tranquilino “Jun” de Ocampo of the Philippine Community in Charlottenburg

Imam Arif Said Ahmed of the Khadija Mosque in Pankow

Pastor Burkhard Bornemann of the Zwölf-Apostel Kirche in Schöneberg

Helene Braun of Abraham Geiger College, University of Potsdam

Imam Nurettin Capan of the Vakif Mosque in Kreuzberg

Cantor Esther Hirsch of the Synagogue Community Berlin Sukkat Schalom in Zehlendorf

Father Sylvester Ajunwa, PhD, of English Speaking Catholic Mission of Berlin

Bhakti Vedanta Yati Maharaj of the Radha Govinda Temple in Reinickendorf

Pastor Rebecca Marquart of the Evangelische Kirchengemeinde, Kreuzberg