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# Philipp von Rosen Galerie

Nic Hess

*Scheinriese*

April 5 – June 21, 2025

Opening on April 4, 2025, 6-9 pm

We are pleased to show *Scheinriese*, our seventh solo exhibition with Nic Hess (\*1968, lives and works in Zurich). In addition to collages made of passepartout cardboard, which appear flat and painted from a distance but then reveal relief-like layers on closer inspection, there are also expansive tape installations on display that enter into a dialog with the wall works.

The artist introduces himself to his audience at the entrance with a light box bearing the inscription “Nic Hess, lives and works in Zurich”. The standardized formulation is familiar from press releases (see above). With this work, Hess self-ironically addresses the mechanisms of the art scene, in which artists’ identities are often reduced to key data. In addition to the light box, we encounter Hess’ new, relief-like collage technique in the work *Swiss Tourism*. With organic, colorful shapes and recesses on different levels, he creates a spatial depth. Cut-outs of illustrations appear between the abstract composition. They show people taking part in classic Swiss tourist sports and are integrated into the artist’s typical dynamic lines of tape.

With these new works, Hess has undergone a remarkable change in his practice. Previously, the composition of his collages was largely guided by the paper material that he usually found in art and architecture magazines and catalogs. Now, compositional forms are no longer primarily dictated by found material, but shaped by himself. Hess “paints” with passepartout cardboard, foam sheets, printed foils and papers as well as adhesive tapes – materials that he removes from their original function and transfers into new contexts of meaning and images.

The ambiguity of his works is not only evident in the technique, but also in the content, that plays with irony and political reflection. The exhibition title *Scheinriese* (mock giant) refers to a character of the same name from Michael Ende’s *Jim Knopf*, who seems bigger the further away he is – and loses size the closer one gets. Metaphorically, the title refers to Nic Hess’ examination of how perception, power and illusions manifest themselves in art and politics – a central theme that runs through the exhibition.

The title of the collage *Adieu and Farewell, CS!* in the first exhibition room refers to the demise of the major Swiss bank Credit Suisse. Colors and shapes pick up on the bank’s logo, the motif – a sailing ship – is not easily recognizable as the four-part collage is deliberately put together “incorrectly”, which reduces the legibility. The composition is inspired by the Chinese puzzle game Tangram and alludes to economic constructions that become unbalanced if they are not put together correctly. In the exhibition, the work is embedded in a tape installation that takes up the game with line combinations and continues it in the room.

With the *500 Milliarden-Ei (500 Billion-Egg)* – an ostrich egg covered with tape and a number – Hess alludes to the 500 billion euro financial package proposed by Friedrich Merz. The title is misleading, as the egg “only” has the figure of 500 million on it. The subtle mistake, which hardly anyone might notice, highlights the absurd scale of this promised financial measure, which seems difficult for us to grasp in concrete terms.

In his works, Nic Hess moves between narrative, symbolic and purely compositional references. In the collage *Unfriendly Fight*, for example, a scene of oppression can be recognized – one figure kneels on the ground while another steps on its upper body. The outline of an elephant, symbol of the US Republicans, suggests a possible reading in the context of American politics. In other works, such as *Oriental Storm*, Hess also works with legible symbols – with a skyline and water waves that create an image of a city or landscape – but the focus is more on the composition and materiality of the work. In some of the new collages, Hess pushes the superimposition of layers and spatial depth so far that they sometimes even step out of the frame.

In the second room of the exhibition, we are showing a series of 12 collages assembled from pages of a catalog documenting works by Rembrandt. Hess combines various of his portraits by layering several pages that directly follow onto each other in the catalog. Cut-outs in the front pages reveal the pictures behind them. Hess thus distorts the original portraits, creating cubist-like depictions and new personalities. On the art market, Rembrandt works are traded at the highest values and have a status of great rarity. In contrast, Hess treats these works carelessly and ironically while playfully encouraging us to reflect on how art, originality and value are dealt with on the art market.

On the head wall of the room, tapes draw the image of a giant shoe being laced up by a small child – lace continues as a line. The black and red tape installation then playfully wraps around the collages, connecting the works across all four walls and creating a visual network that restructures and rhythmizes the space. Small details on printed foil – such as a frog looking over a corner of the room to a fly directly under the ceiling – add narrative elements to the installation and encourage visitors to actively move around and engage with the installation and its details.

Direct references to artists and their artworks can be seen again and again in Hess' works. For example, he reproduces Bridget Riley's drawing *Movement in Squares* almost identically by using his characteristic tape technique to recreate it. In *Half Klimt Half Wesley*, to be seen in the third and final room of the exhibition, he adopts forms and contours from John Wesley's *Klimt Nude* using his collage technique and comments on the depiction with signs and symbols. For example, he places a grid form directly over the intimate area of the female depiction. Hess' reproduction and reinterpretation of past works of art open up the possibility of viewing social processes or themes – such as in this case the depiction of women and nudity – in a new context. However, it is not always about criticism, but often also about appreciation and inspiration.

In the last room, the work *Adieu CS!* – a one-part variation of the four-part collage *Adieu and Farewell, CS!* from the first room – unravels the play on the composition of the collage. The narrative moment, which repeatedly appears in Hess' collages and tape installations, is thus taken up curatorially and marks the end of the exhibition with the conclusion of the plot.

If you have any further questions or would like to receive images, please contact the gallery.