

PRESS RELEASE

Jean-Marie Appriou

Gemini

November 9 – December 22, 2023

Opening on Wednesday, November 8, 6 – 9 pm

Lichtenfelsgasse 5, A-1010 Vienna

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present *Gemini*, the gallery's third exhibition with the French artist Jean-Marie Appriou.

The story of life on Earth is a story of twins. Ever since the first organisms bubbled into being, tiny specks in a vast primordial soup, they have been splitting themselves in two. Billions of years later, even the largest creatures still begin life as single cells that divide into identical daughters. One becomes two, two becomes four, and eventually, these exponential broods become us.

The French artist Jean-Marie Appriou has a keen eye for the twins that shape our collective imagination: the kindred concepts and subtle dualities with which we make sense of the world. In previous exhibitions, Appriou has deftly illuminated the ways in which our notions of the prehistoric past and dreams of the distant future walk hand in hand. With *Gemini*, his new show at Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Appriou invites us to consider a different set of twins—poetry and sculpture—through the lens of the Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke and the French artist Auguste Rodin.

Rilke was already an established poet when, in 1902 at the age of 26, he traveled to Paris to write a monograph on the eminent sculptor. In a letter sent not long after their first meeting, Rilke confessed to Rodin: "It is not just to write a study that I have come to you, it is to ask you: how should I live?" Through his ongoing contact with Rodin, Rilke developed an entirely new approach. He embraced the rigor and discipline of working full days and shed the flourishes of his early verse. "He disavows texts composed before this date," notes the writer Claire Gheerardyn, "as if contact with sculpture had finally propelled him into true poetry." With his new work, Rilke sought to create "poem things" (*Dinge-Gedichte*) that possess the tactility of bronze or clay: poems with the physical presence of sculptures.

Rilke has been an enduring lodestar for Appriou, who rarely travels without a copy of *Letters to a Young Poet*. For this exhibition, Appriou has created three glass portraits of Rilke tinted with ink, as though the poet's words were suffusing his very flesh and blood. These sculptures are the first in a new series of portraits that Appriou plans to produce in homage to the writers who have influenced him and his work: Charles Baudelaire (an icon he shares with Rodin), Mary Shelley, and Edgar Allen Poe are still to come. Clouds of smoke seem to swirl within the glass, tantalizingly translucent and opaque, just as the best poems invite interpretation even as they retain an enduring sense of mystery.

Another face, this one bronze with parted lips, returns our gaze through a pair of cobalt glasses. Deep cracks branch across the cheeks and brow of this observer like bolts of lightning. When Appriou first modeled this face in clay, the surface was pristine. Left in a corner of the studio, however, the piece dried out and developed deep fissures. Appriou embraced the transformation and casted the new face in bronze, just as Rodin repurposed old pieces again and again to produce new sculptures. This ability to discover fresh possibilities in past creations, to look ahead while gazing back, is central to Appriou's practice. A willing eye and a fresh lens, it seems, are sometimes all it takes to detect the traces of the future hiding in plain sight.

Although their faces are concealed by helmets, the twin astronauts at the center of the exhibition also seem to be gazing forward into time and space. They lean forward slightly, poised on their toes, apparently excited by what they see. This pair stands close together—perhaps they were a single being that has only just cleaved apart. Instead of glass, Appriou has given them bronze helmets with polished visors that deflect our gaze. It's a protective gesture, as though the artist wants to shield these slender figures from external forces, just as Rilke encouraged Franz Xaver Kappus, the young poet who sought his advice, to turn inward.

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“You must work, always work (“*Travailler, toujours travailler*”). This was the mantra Rodin imparted to Rilke and one that also seems to drive Appriou. The astonishingly prolific artist has shifted from the common repetitive use of molds to produce multiple sculptures, opting instead to model new and distinct pieces for every show. There’s a temptation, when one is constantly creating, to show as much as possible, but the restraint of this exhibition sets it apart. With *Gemini*, Appriou has carefully chosen just five elemental sculptures to present his vision in its most concentrated form. In this distilled environment, poetry and sculpture bind themselves together before our eyes.

Zoë Lescaze

Jean-Marie Appriou was born 1986 in Brest, FR, and lives and works in Paris, FR. Recent solo exhibitions include *Art Club #35*, Villa Medici, Rome, IT (2022); *Surface Horizon*, Lafayette Anticipations, Paris, FR (2021); *The Horses*, organized by Public Art Fund, Doris C. Freedman Plaza, New York, NY, US (2019–2020); *Seabed*, Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2019–2020); and *Open Space #1*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, FR (2018). Appriou participated with a monumental sculpture titled *Horizons* (2023) at Art Basel Unlimited 2023, Basel, CH (2023); with a major installation titled *Roncier in Là où les eaux se mêlent*, Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, FR (2019); and with a major sculpture titled *Mirage* (2016) in the Public Sector of Art Basel in Miami Beach, FL, US (2016). Selected institutional group exhibitions include *The Dreamers*, 58th October Salon Belgrade Biennial, Belgrade, RS (2021); *Anima Muni*, Manifesta 13 Marseille, Marseille, FR (2020); *Childhood: Another banana for the dream-fish*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2018); *Neuer Norden Zürich*, KiöR – Kunst im öffentlichen Raum, Zurich, CH (2018); *Deux sens du décoratif*, Centre d’art Contemporain, Brest, FR (2018); *Voyage d’Hiver*, Château de Versailles, Versailles, FR (2017); *Robots. Work. Our Future*, Vienna Biennale, Vienna, AT (2017); *MEDUSA*, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, FR (2017); *L’Usage des Formes*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2015); and *La solitude*, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, NO (2014).

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