**“Sleep, Death’s Own Brother”**

The George Economou Collection

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Steven Shearer (*1968) elusive paintings pay tribute to the cult of the dandy in painterly representations of limply boned, white men who pursue their own doctrines of beauty and individuality. It is customary in literature that he comes from privilege, yet shows immense disregard for money, his proclivity for the arts conferring a superiority of the mind that defies into art as an esoteric journey.

Curated by Dieter Roelstraete, “Sleep, Death’s Own Brother” is built around substantial holdings of Shearer’s work at Athens’s George Economou Collection and places particular emphasis on the artist’s paintings. Shearer’s portraits appear incongruous with the genre, as if their intention is not to capture the qualities of the individual sitter, but to mystify the style and mental space of the mostly young, androgynous figures the painter has chosen to immortalize. Take the in-profile title character in Man Sitting (2006), who wears his long, black hair like a veil over his face, escaping or negating the viewer’s gaze. Shirtless and slump-shouldered on a green-upholstered bench, his face, escaping or negating the view, wears his long, black hair like a veil over his face, escaping or negating the viewer’s gaze. Sheetless and slump-shouldered on a green-upholstered bench, he is sanded coif sternly swept back, who poses a new acquisition. Desire, occasionally verging on obsession, imbues this medium-sized, one-quarter picture offering an insight into the collector’s mindset. Foregrounded against a tangle of wild red silhouettes, the steel-blue and bloodshot eyes of the collector fuses the artist’s life with agony and suffering, exacting steep costs against the quest for beauty as a higher moral purpose.

Photography, in which rise as an art-form New Objectivity was instrumental, likewise has had significant bearing on Shearer’s visual language; in that sense, Sleep II (2015), an enormous photo collage that takes up the entirety of the collection’s top-floor galleries, feels like a culmination. Comprising thousands of web-found images of sleeping people, the work cunningly invites its leaned-in viewers to pry into the exposed intimacies of others, only to startle awake the disarmed inhumanity that these many anonymous persons are dead.

As the work rouses and relieves this anxiety of gazing, “Sleep, Death’s Own Brother” sets forth a vision of rebellion and darkly proposes suicide as life’s ultimate choice, his treatment sensitively mixing nihilism, empathy, and awe. The juxtaposition of his own ink works with drawings by Otto Dix, Otto Mueller, and Rudolf Schlichter underlines the artists’ thematic and aesthetic affinities and complicates the reading of Shearer’s work, bringing him closer to the key proponents of Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), who arrayed themselves against Expressionism’s utopian urges and distortions. The juxtaposition simultaneously serves as a reminder that categorizations of Shearer’s work can feel vacuous; by paying knowing tribute to specific moments in the history of art, he grants himself the liberty – as only a dandy could – to freely navigate its currents, confluences, and contradictions.

From Plato to Schopenhauer, numerous philosophers have aligned beauty and mortality, arguing that those who appreciate beauty are, by default, more attuned to virtues of sensitivity, empathy, and compassion. The Romanticist Potter (2021), one of the exhibition’s most ambitious works, shows an apron-clad, thin-chested craftsman pitched over his throwing wheel, hands nearly clasped around a lump of glowing-gold clay, surrounded by vessels glazed with swirled shadows like bowels. An old-school admirer and a perpetrator of styles, Shearer’s confident realism conveys a new art-historical protagonist very much at control of his medium.

Conversely, Shearer’s drawings convey an ominous vulnerability. Banul (2004), one of the most emotionally charged works on paper on display, might titillate the artist’s passion for punk metal and darkly proposes suicide as life’s ultimate choice, his treatment sensitively mixing nihilism, empathy, and awe.