



CLEARING

Josip Novosel
I am calling the police!
April 19 – May 27, 2023

“Those beautiful clear blue eyes that popped out even more cause he was wearing a brown Bavarian hat in this brown Bavarian chique restaurant.

It was completely mesmerizing.

Those clear blue eyes that looked at me for a second while I was not walking anymore. I was flying. And those perfect lips surrounded by this beautiful trimmed beard that made a gentle style out of his face.”

— Josip Novosel, *AFTERAFFECTION*, 2015

Clearing is pleased to present *I am calling the police!*, Berlin-based artist Josip Novosel's first exhibition with the gallery in Brussels.

Seventeen watercolour works on paper showing intimate scenes inspired by Bavarian traditions, folklore, and attire revisited through the artist's gaze line the gallery walls. Straddling illustration, the comic strip, and contemporary genre painting, Josip Novosel's drawings reframe and reclaim with humour and sensitivity the codes and signs belonging to the culture of his home region.

Like diary entries both recording events passed and manifesting a world lusted for, the drawings were executed daily by the artist after working relentlessly in a traditional Bavarian restaurant. Novosel would retire alone to his bedroom to create the watercolours, which both exorcise sentiments relating to the conservative atmosphere he was bathed in daily, and exercise the artist's desires and fantasies, which he affectionately projects upon the men who populated the eatery and the surrounding alpine town.

Siggi, Martin, Rainer, Alfons, and Hias, bedecked in their skin tight lederhosen, cruise and frolic together in the woods amongst fir trees and below mountains, compete at “fingerhakeln” or finger pulling fights, and nibble on grapes. Sweet sweat drips in the heat of the Bavarian summer as the bears clink frothing beer mugs together, dance with fists clenched, and slap each other's thighs. The artist himself also appears occasionally, albeit tucked away in bed amidst a lucid dream of overlapping burly bodies, cosplaying as a docile purple alien, or moonlighting as a suggestive ostrich morphing out of an underbelly; a not-so-subtle allusion to Franz Josef Strauss, the late, vehemently catholic, nationalist and conservative politician (for the non Germanophones, *Strauss* means ostrich).

Novosel plays with cultural signifiers, whether those linked to tradition (i.e. the women's Dirndl bow on the right or left, respectively meaning they are married or single), or those used as queer signals: an earring on the right side, or flagging with handkerchiefs. Several drawings adroitly collide such symbols: in *Rainers Charivari das er seit den 80ern hat*, we zoom on a generous crotch, sporting a traditional Charivari chain, indicating both an allegiance to countryside and wealth and to the gay community. Poppers, a mini butt plug, a bear paw, Klaus Nomi, and a BMW keychain sit atop a hand (belonging to whom?) which reaches into the conveniently placed flap of the lederhosen. In other scenes, Oakley sunglasses reflecting a bulging package appear alongside a felted alpine hat, beer mousse drips like sweat or cum atop an orgy of miniature men, and a woollen chequered shirt pops open to reveal an equally woolly chest below, boasting a leather harness

which, when not used for BDSM one might associate with more equestrian pursuits.

Tracing their outlines as if caressing them with the tips of his fingers, the artist is a puppetmaster to the archetypal folkloric Bavarian male, forming a new homoerotic trope from his (perhaps) unknowing subjects. Through these works, Novosel reveals an underlying camp or queer narrative that exists within what most might consider an overtly traditionalist and heteromasculine atmosphere. The scenes of camaraderie and pleasure are charged but never lurid, and while offering a glimpse into Novosel's desires, ruffle our prejudices and clichés and question our inherited or binary ways of assigning cultures and traditions. Why should we have it one way or another, when we can have both?

A.C.

Josip Novosel (born 1988 in Zagreb, HR) lives and works in Berlin.

Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at Jupiter Woods, Vienna; Bureaucracy Studies, Lausanne; Les Urbaines, Lausanne; Florida Lothringer 13, Munich; Greta Gallery, Zagreb; and Galerie Noah Klink, Berlin.

His work has been featured in several group exhibitions, including the Belvedere 21, Vienna; Leopold Museum, Vienna; Frans Hals Museum, Amsterdam and; Etablissement d'en face, Brussels.

He will participate in a group show curated by Gigiotto Del Vecchio at HUA International, Berlin from April 28 to July 15, 2023.