

Mathis Altmann
PRESS



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Tragicomedy prototypes at Istituto Svizzero
by Ginevra Bria

Mathis Altmann. Tragicomedy **prototypes at Istituto Svizzero**

The first solo presentation in Italy by the German artist encompasses layered stages of the Absurd, at different scales.



As usual, for Mathis Altmann's practice, there is no a literal current English translation for the title of his solo show. In Milan, "Delve of Spade" (*Spatenstich*) should just describe the ceremonial act of breaking the soil to celebrate the construction of a new building.

It is an artisanal first dig, executed by hands before heavy machinery takes over. But on another side, yet it evokes a sort of an hidden, unconscious and obscure desire, a nostalgic act that harkens back to bare naked human effort and the suffering blistered hand.

The Istituto Svizzero's ground floor hall has never been so methodically and confusedly filled up for a long time.



"Delve of Spade", installation views at Istituto Svizzero, Milan

Since 1997, the Milanese premises of the Istituto Svizzero have served as a platform for Swiss art and culture in the capital city of the region of Lombardy, the nerve centre of the Italian economy with a particularly dynamic role in the fields of creation and innovation. Located in the proximity of Piazza Cavour, the Istituto Svizzero occupies a historical building of the 1950s and its programme includes exhibitions, conferences, concerts and meetings, always with the intent of fostering artistic and scientific exchange between Switzerland and Italy.

"Delve of Spade" appears as an exception from the main rule of offering only young Swiss artists and scientists the opportunity to continue and develop their research and activities in Italy. Altmann was born in Munich, in 1987, while he actually lives and works in Los Angeles and Zurich.



Mathis Altmann, view from the exhibition's bottom, "Delve of Spade", Istituto Svizzero, Milan, 2018

Thus his approach always recalls a symptomatic, stratified travelogue on his several dwelling and studio-working experiences. The hugest installation of his last solo show is also the one lending the title to the whole exhibition. *Delve of Spade* (2018) arises as if it were structurally floating, in the middle of the hall; an open environment composed of room dividers, frowning and disquieting mannequins, pillow, shovels, chairs, pouf, electric skateboard, debris and then glass doors.

All around, concerned with modes of architectural projection, the artist shows forms of collective memory perpetuation. Central to this exhibition are new sculptures and their setting which mock open workspace environments, a common aesthetic turned global phenomena throughout trade-oriented metropolitan centres. These areas designed for the needs of cognitive workforces and new form of mobile, transient labour. Homogenous and repetitive, so recognizable so as not to distract.

Related to this concept, *Teutonic Disaster* (2018, wood, plastic, glass, metal, chair, shelf, paint, foam, acrylic glass, laser-engraving, LEDs, miniatures) looks like a distorted downtown Los Angeles mock-up, a supposed reproduction of the Arts District. Each single sculptural aggregate assumes the language of a urban reconversion and a re-narration.

Indeed, Altmann finds the stories told and listened as part of this process of redesigning entire urban areas disturbing and fascinating in equal measure. Since the beginning, "Delve of Spade" first piece, *Same Old, Same Old* (2018, plastic, metal, acrylic-glass, laser-engraving, ink-jet prints, sweater, LEDs, miniatures, vinyl-decals) is deeply hinged on its own derelict materiality. In the exhibition, whole of the urban models are not made from typical neutral white foam board but from a combination of raw materials and domestic detritus: sections of facades and pieces of furniture embedded within aluminium, plastic, bronze, glass, and concrete.

Each assemblage incorporates the materials and vernacular associated with the mixed-use urbanism that is an Altmann's stylistic hallmark, focused on underlining community engagements. As a contorted map of new urban realities, "Delve of Spade" suggests optional narratives re-constructing a sardonic, doubtful, hoarder present.

Exhibition Title: Mathis Altmann. Delve of Spade **Opening dates:** 22 September – 27 October 2018 **Curated by:** Samuel Gross **Venue:** Istituto Svizzero **Address:** via Vecchio Politecnico 3, Milan