

MICHEL SOSKINE INC.

# SIMON WILLEMS

## ROGUE ELEMENTS

Dates: **from september 12th to october 20th, 2012**

Opening: **september 12th 20.00 - 22.00. To coincide with Apertura 2012 (ArteMadrid)**

**The artist will be present.**

Where: **Calle Padilla 38, 1º Dcha.**

Opening times: **M - V: 10.30 - 14.30 / 16.30 - 20.00 , S: 10.30 - 14.30 / Afternoon by appointment**

Michel Soskine presents in his gallery the first solo exhibition show in Spain of the english artist Simon Willems, (Shoreham-by-sea, UK,1971). The exhibition shows 25 small size paintings of the past 12 years, including the projects *All Things for all People* and *A Certain Way to Fade*. The work that features in this show relates to a number of narrative strands and details that run consistently through the work of Simon Willems. At a formative level Willems is interested in images and ideas that confuse mental and physical realities. He searches beauty in the strangest places, challenging the stereotyped ideals of british culture of what is to be considered beautiful and not.

Political artist, socially involved, Willems focuses on the issue of societal withdrawal and our voyeuristic consumption of the spectacle. His painting are metanarratives that show ideal english gardens, imaginary lanscapes, worrying animals; they are works full of figures, bodies and landscapes that seem to be constantly in process of execution to then dissolve.

Willems' thinking centres on the recognition of incongruous contexts and narratives that refer to specific places and people, where the placement and location of memory and its erasure have been central. Fascinated with the reflecting surfaces, in his work we can find many bubbles than can show hidden worlds: we cannot stay with the first impression, because the meaning of his work is open to many interpretations as the perceived sensibilities.



All Things for all People

Project conceived in response to the unexpected discovery of the Mandarom, as viewed through a set of binoculars from a pedalo in Provence, France, whilst on holiday.

The Mandarom are a cult that represents all religions. The organisation was founded as the 'Aumist' religion in 1969 in the holy city of Shambhasalem by its founding leader, Gilbert Bourdin. Bourdin went on to build a number of temples, statues and shrines to various faiths, at the centre of which sat a 33 metre high representation of himself, as the self-proclaimed cosmo-planetary messiah.

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For Willems the Mandarom narrative appealed on many levels, not least in the absurd irony of witnessing a remote sect displaying ‘neverland’ exhibitionism from the heart of a national park. Beyond its anecdotal charm and incongruous location, the project opened up questions of narrative construction in both the French government and the sect itself (Willems discovered that the community gave tours twice-weekly during the summer).

The works in this project are all small size, in greys and pastels, proposing a intimacy that contrasts with the giant size sculptures they reflect.



A Certain Way to Fade

Part of a broader project that takes new stories about hermits as a lens through which to foreground personalised utopias, *A certain way to fade* was conceived in response to the story of Manfred Gnädinger, best known as the “Alemán” (the German) and then just “Man” – a name he eagerly accepted for its symbolism. He migrated to the small fishing village of Cammelle in Northern Spain in the late sixties. It is said he went mad there after falling in love with a teacher in the village who refused his advances. During this period he built an extensive oeuvre of beach-derived sculpture and artworks, as a museum within the organic garden he created and ate from. Working alone with nature, Gnädinger’s world was crushed when the Prestige Oil spill of 2002 blighted the northern Spanish coastline, destroying most of his garden and its contents. Soon afterwards he was found dead in his self-made home.

Willems’ interest in “Man” is not solely in Gnädinger’s choice to live this way but more critically in how he was championed as a symbol of the oil-spill tragedy, exacerbating his local fame to a point of overwhelming media intrusion that subsequently affected his mental health and eventual death. Tourist detritus and other details present a similar logic as a ubiquitous metaphor of wholesale consumption: the abandoned baseball cap, the half-eaten fast food and the menacing presence of the seagull parasite.

Graduated in the Royal College of Art, Simon Willems has exhibited in several galleries in London and abroad. Public collections amongst others **Royal College of Art, The Zabłudowicz Collection, The Leonard Nimoy Collection, David Roberts Collection, Fondation COLAS, FRAC Auvergne, FRAC Haute-Normandie and Frederick Weisman Foundation.**