

PRESTIGE magazine

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Infinitely Creative, Infinitely Versatile

Whether figurative sculptures, large-format digital paintings or art for architecture – the works of the Swiss artist Roland Faesser are exquisitely ironic, light-footed and seasoned with a pinch of Faesser's inimitable humor.

Text: Anka Refghi
Photos: Roland Faesser

His Zurich loft is a work of art in itself. It used to accommodate a locksmith's shop and yes, the dimensions of the space have undoubtedly left their stamp on the size of his works! His roommates? These are "animal" sculptures. A stuffed kangaroo, a desiccated crocodile, toy figures of all shapes and sizes, and a motorcycle that testifies to the days when there was still room enough to drive around in his studio. In short: a creative (play)ground with things to discover in every nook and cranny. And when Roland Faesser talks about the first years of his life and his father's profession as CEO of a large toy shop in Lima, it's hard to escape the suspicion of a seminal influence. But first things first.

Play Instinct

Faesser was born in Lima; his father was a Swiss emigrant and his mother a Peruvian with Italian roots. At the age of six with the political situation deteriorating due to the military takeover in Peru, his father decided to return to Switzerland with his family – back to a world of art and culture, with which he first came into contact through his grandmother, an inveterate Elvis fan who lived in Switzerland. After a relatively late decision to study architecture at the renowned ETH Zurich, he devoted himself entirely to the arts.

The Belgian Rabbit

Faesser launched his career in the early 1990s with his now legendary "HausTiere", a play on words since *Hautier* is the German word for "domestic animal" and literally translates as "house animal". The result: a series of animal figures whose bodies morph into rudimentary houses in endless variations. This delightfully creative and whimsical series is indebted to a real animal, to be more precise, a Belgian rabbit. It belonged to his girlfriend at the time, an architecture student, who was not about to leave her rabbit behind upon moving into the loft with him. When one of her architectural models landed in the trashcan, he rescued it and impetuously tied it to the rabbit's back. The rabbit hobbled through the studio unimpressed by the cardboard model on his back and the "HausTier" was born.

Roberto Blanco and Word Art

Toys of all kinds are Roland Faesser's inspiration, most especially old ones and, as he says, authentic toys that he finds in thrift stores or at flea markets. He works intuitively. "In the past," says the artist, "I constantly forced myself to make sketches, but not a single one ever turned into a work of art." His contemporary figurative sculptures consist of appropriated everyday objects and toys, with which he creates wonderfully bizarre and humorous realities. His works inevitably make viewers smile, but they are also as profound as they are subtle. Take, for instance, the glossy blue deer's head with an inflatable monkey in its sculpted antlers, bearing the allusive title "Ceci n'est pas un Koons", a gentle jibe at one of the world's most highly paid artists. "Not In The Wildest Dreams" is the title given to another deer's head, upon which the artist not only plunked an SM mask, but also embellished the antlers with naked Barbies. Poodle figures with pink, spherical shapes above their heads are dubbed "Big Balls" and the wild boar's head with shoulders resting on the side table is titled "Table Surfer". Then there is the deer's head with antlers of Daffy Duck, ant, and Kermit the frog with Afro wig, which is tellingly named "Roberto Blanco". These titles all go to show that words are another of Faesser's top-notch skills. The interaction of image and word, visual language and the reading of pictures: these disciplines, as the artist notes, are rarely targeted except by filmmakers and advertisers. "Today, everyone has the feeling that they can deal with images. But that's not the truth. Visual language should be taught from the beginning, along with reading and writing," says the charismatic artist.

Digital Worlds

Faesser is at home in a wide variety of media and materials, as demonstrated not only by his work in the field of art for architecture, but also by his digital paintings. He mastered the digital universe long ago. In his large-format and collage-like paintings, he weds pop art and graffiti elements with the most diverse worlds and does not shy away from inserting small abstract and toy figures into important scenes from the history of art and film. He now also designs his sculptures in 3D at the computer. On the one hand, it saves space and on the other, it's reassuring should he lose his loft someday. Faesser reinvents the world every time he empties out his creative cornucopia, as in "A Horse Is A Horse" (even if it is trapped upside down in the rock). Reproduced on our cover page, it is his vision of a new landmark for the cathedral square in Lecce. And there's another one of his ideas that we'd rather see translated into reality today than tomorrow: namely, his sculptures populating the flat roofs of the New York skyline, as proposed for the New Museum. Roland Faesser – artist, eloquent wordsmith and teacher - is a creative, gifted and infinitely versatile humanist, whose works can be found in numerous exhibitions and renowned collections.

On Top

Over the years Roland Faesser has been a professor, lecturer and art critic in many art and architecture institutions, such as the ETH Zurich, the F+F Kunsthochschule in Zurich, the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst Zurich, the Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, the Academy of Design in Vorarlberg, Austria and many more. He has taught in the fields of visual design, architecture, scenography, interior design, industrial design, gender studies, intermedia and image lab.

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