

# METRO PICTURES

Gvero, Virna. "Olaf Breuning: A 'love-hate relationship' with contemporary art," *Happening.media* (March 17, 2017).



Olaf Breuning, *The Wall*, (2017) 3 ceramic sculptures 9.45 x 13.78 x 9.84 inches 24 x 35 x 25 cm

"I wish I could be a painter and I wish I could be a writer." Despite having worked with a plethora of mediums — including drawing, sculpture, photography, film and installation — during his 18-year long career, artist Olaf Breuning is still pining for more.

Innovation is key for the Swiss-born artist, who has now lived in New York for over a decade, where he has just finished installing his latest exhibition at Metro Pictures gallery, (running March 17 through April 15) presenting a new series of drawings and ceramic sculptures.

Breuning's works, which he has showed at some of the world's most renowned institutions, including Paris' Centre Pompidou, the MoMA, London's Whitechapel gallery and Tokyo's Mori Art museum, are often pinned down to his use of humour. But with sculptures such as *The Wall* (2017) — presented at Metro Pictures on occasion of this show — the inherent urgency of some of the world's most pressing political issues, find their way in the artist's practice, and their apparent lightheartedness leaves room for a more profound questioning of the themes at play in Breuning's practice.

HAPPENING spoke to Breuning on occasion of his Metro Pictures show, its seventh at the gallery.

**Can you start by telling us about this most recent exhibition. How long have you been working on these pieces. What are the main themes at play?**

I've been doing drawings for more than ten years, and I published a book of drawings last year. A lot of the ceramic works I have done for this show are based on drawings as well. I see a drawing and I think that it would be nice to have it in three dimensions, like a sculpture. I've only been doing Ceramics for about ten months, but I've produced a lot. All these works speak about life, in the way that people like you or I experience life, and about all the things that we experience as humans in this rather short time we have.

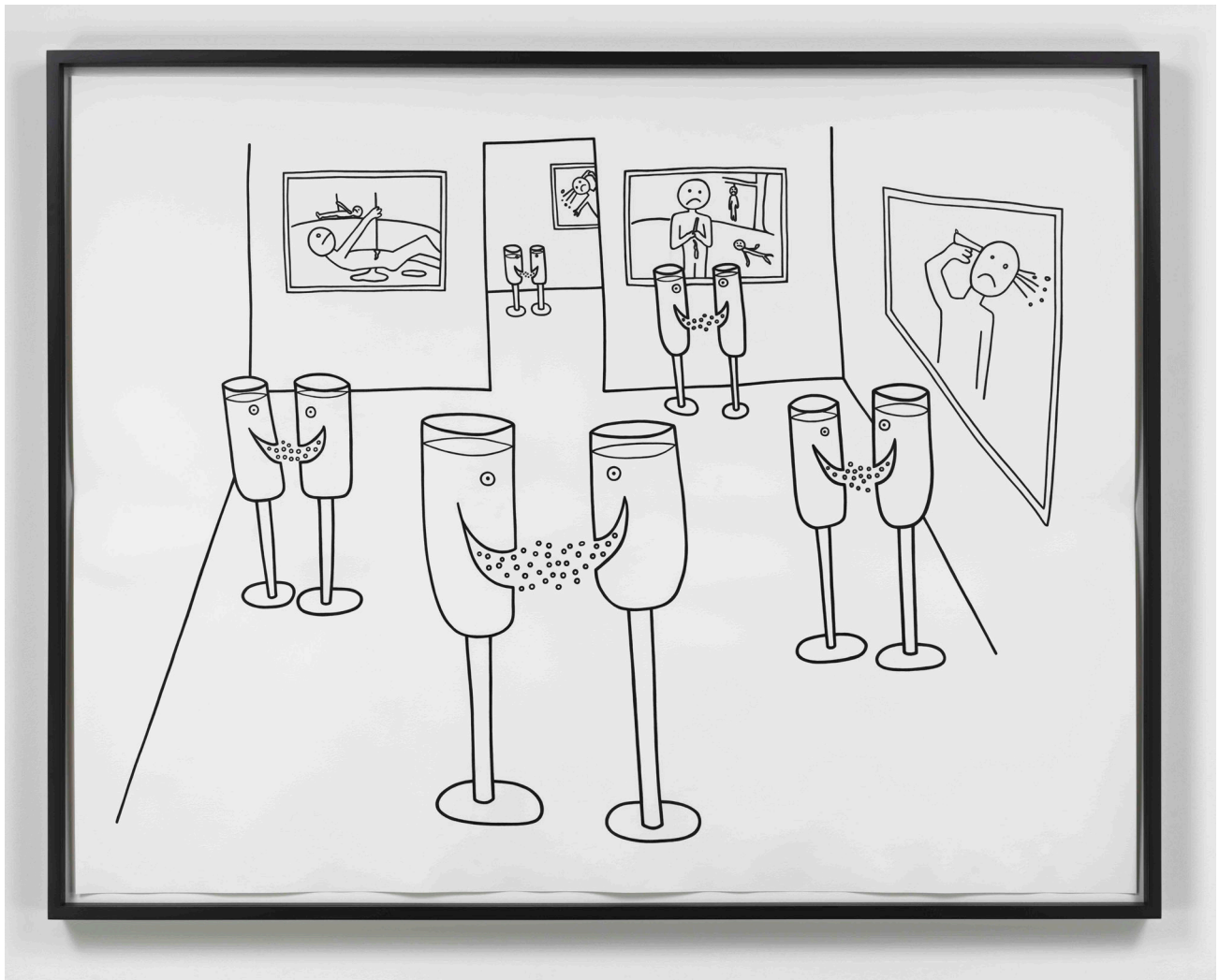
**A lot of the time people talk about humour in reference to your work. Surely humour is part of your work, but works such as *The Wall* speak about our times – walls being quite a strong symbol in today's political landscape. How would you then define your use of humour?**

For me, humour is a sign of intelligence. I always prefer people who speak about serious things with a smile on their face. I am wary of people who never smile. Humour is the only hope we have to confront tragic ideas and events in our lives, in a more light-hearted way. Speaking about the world now, what Trump wants to do...building the wall and so on. It's very sad. But you don't have to take that sadness into your work, it can also go a different way. My work is very colorful, it's funny, I find each of my works highly philosophical. People might think it's just funny, or it's just humour, and I don't care, it's fine, but for me it's often more serious than that: I want to work with themes that we are confronted with today.

I am also working on a photograph that I'll take in the Swiss mountains, it's about global warming. I had to work with the idea of global warming and how to put that complex idea into a simple photo. I try to pick out scenes that are pertinent to today and include them in my work, and global warming is something that we have to deal with in the next decades, it's not something that will disappear.



From the series *Art Freaks*. Installation view, 2016. NRW-Forum Düsseldorf, Germany



Olaf Breuning, *My Opening*, (2015) Graphite on paper 49 1/8 x 63 1/2 inches 124.8 x 161.3 cm

**Looking at works such as *Art Freaks*, they pretty explicitly engage with art history. What do you think is your relationship to those artists who came before you?**

As an artist I am surely influenced by what moves around me. Today, so much art is produced, but it's just a remake of something that has been done before. The same happens in music and fashion, which makes me realize that no new invention is really possible. The time of "pioneer works" is over; all the more so in contemporary art. I really believe that being truly "original" is no longer possible. The originality that Cindy Sherman had for example, it's probably not possible to do anything like that anymore. But it doesn't matter. Honestly, I really believe that an artist's own language is what really matters.

**You have often been critical of the contemporary art world. How would you describe your relationship with contemporary art?**

I'd say it's a love-hate relationship. Artists have only one brain and we can only do so much, and reinvent ourselves so much, and the art world around us is fucking crazy. It's just never-ending, people I met ten years ago have a completely different -taste in art than they did when I met them. As an artist you sit there asking yourself: what do I do? It's very confusing. So that's the "hate" part. But it's what it is, and that's what's being an artist, you have your own language and sometimes it fits into the whole scene around you or it fits less. The artist's always on thin ice.