

KENTON NELSON**"NEW PAINTINGS OF COMMON OBJECTS"**

13 November 2020 – 13 January 2021

The title of our exhibition goes back to 1962 and the very first museum exhibition of American Pop Art in the USA, held in the Pasadena Art Museum and entitled *New Painting of Common Objects*. It brought together the Who's Who of Pop Art, including Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Edward Ruscha. **KENTON NELSON** (b 1954 in Los Angeles), borrowed the title, rather tongue-in-cheek, for his new exhibition. He, too, focuses on the object: model car, pencil sharpener, watch, clock, lawnmower, train and deck-chair are all presented on canvas, joined by a dog and an elephant, which expand the concept of "object". Viewing the works evokes memories of films from the distant past: the lifestyle of the 1950s and '60s comes vividly to mind. In keeping with today's *Zeitgeist* of "retro", interiors (*Uprising*), cars, furniture (*The Counting*) and dress (*Herself's Daily*) are reminiscent of earlier advertising posters and Hollywood films. His use of light contributes to this effect: light and shade, definition and blurring generate precisely contoured outlines evoking clarity and calm. There arises a longing for a perfect world, inherent in Nelson's painting, reflecting the artist's approach of creating on his canvases an idealised version of an imperfect world.

The details look like snapshots; individual motifs are cut off and only partially visible (*For Industry's Sake*), though their clear definition conveys the theme of the picture. Sometimes, however, the deeper sense lies in what is concealed, thus leaving it to the viewer's imagination (*Hegira*). Formally, Nelson's works are reminiscent of the New Objectivity: after selecting the appropriate motif, he transfers it, first as a drawing, then with oils, on to the canvas. The still visible brush-strokes are neatly smoothed down to give a perfect glossy surface. Art-historical roots are discernible in the oeuvre of the American realist Edward Hopper, or of the 1930s regionalists, such as Grant Wood or Thomas Hart Benton.

KENTON NELSON depicts simple scenes of everyday life, which – often through their ambiguous titles – tell brief stories that awaken the viewer's own associations and memories (*A Rude Awakening*, *The Counting*). *Micro Racer* recalls the childhood passion for collecting Matchbox cars. Although at first glance the motifs seem mainly related to American culture, one thing becomes clear: the codes concealed within the objects are understood internationally. *Incubation*, *Summer* and *Afloat* stand for the season of leisure and the exhilaration of freedom. In times like the present, the positive mood that results from looking at Kenton Nelson's work is most welcome.

Salzburg, October 2020

Katja Mittendorfer