



German painter Martin Eder's first Belgian solo exhibition, KARMAGEDDON at TICK TACK explores the uneasy relationship between fantasy and reality.

Words by Millen Brown-Ewens

# DIVINING KARMAGEDDON

**Do the images in our Instagram feeds have a life beyond our phones? What will be left of us when the cycle of consumption has spun us into the abyss? Exploring the brutality and ruthlessness of our times, artist Martin Eder peddles the superficiality that permeates digital culture, to deliver us at the precipice of consciousness. His oil paintings – best described as explosive divinations – consider the fallout of dopamine culture as a doomsday scenario in which the very presence of beauty suspends belief.**

‘Karmageddon’, the artist’s recent site-specific solo exhibition at TICK TACK in Antwerp, transports the saccharine imagery of our social media feeds to the canvas, preserving them in a mythical cosmos. Eder refers to this process in a framework of magic, a mode of rationality that recognises the invisible force of compulsive social media-use that effects a change in our material ‘reality’.

“There are lots of question marks in this exhibition,” says Eder. “How does the onslaught of images truly affect us? Does all of this information make the world better? In general, I would say yes, but there comes a point where this becomes destructive, where people are so overwhelmed they can’t even go outside. Are our brains prepared for the overkill?”

Even now, as I sit in front of one screen, a catalogue of Eder’s installation images before me, another screen is positioned across the room, deviously aglow with the ‘magic of maybe’. What will it be this time? A reel of someone-or-other crocheting a hat for their Jack Russell? Or perhaps two strangers sharing their meet-cute with a man and his camera; or an impeccably dressed four-year-old teaching me basic domestic science. When I pick up the device, the degree of unpredictability pilots me to commence scrolling, each image evoking sensations of pleasure, shock or outrage, each a quick hit. When I’m spent, my head fuzzy with pixels, I get up and move my phone into another room in order to keep it out of reach. I cannot let it distract me any longer.

What awaits us in Eder’s world is a barren psychedelic atmosphere where fragments of trashy phantasmagoria appear as apparitions of our digital addiction. “It returns us to the primal cave where, emerging from the darkness, you look into

the daylight. The light of the future blinds you but you can’t turn back because you’re also blinded by the darkness. The only option is to go further into the light without knowing what awaits you.”

The show’s title – a self-explanatory mix of karma and Armageddon – alludes to the end of the world, the end of the future, and the end of esoteric warfare. These paintings, in their vivid peculiarity, are an augury of death.

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‘Karmageddon’ conceives the magic of maybe as a hypothetical apocalypse. Eder reclaims the “church of fear” that we live in, where everything, including the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence, is a threat to humanity. “Our brains have always been collecting information, analysing it, and putting it back out into the world. That’s called inspiration and is the fundamental process of creativity,” says the artist. “Mimicking our way of behaviour in the machine is something I don’t consider to be particularly extraordinary. What makes it so is the outcome and unpredictability of the way in which these technologies develop that will inevitably stretch beyond our control.”

“I often say to people that I have never painted a kitten or even a human

figure. What I paint are the ghosts of these subjects,” Eder reflects. “The afterglow of the atom bomb. The echoes of existence. It’s like going into a trance state, where you can’t experience corporeality but instead just the shapes of your memories. I imagine it as a near-death experience where people are surrounded by the angelic and non-angelic demons that haunt them.”

One such demon is the perfectly pampered pooch in the painting *Geist/Psyche*. “The word ‘geist’ has two meanings,” Eder informs. “Both the spirit within the psychological state and also the ghost, the spectral figure on the staircase wearing a white sheet. The poodle in *Geist/Psyche* has this white bouffant that looks a little ghostlike. But most importantly, it’s an artificial creature made by humans. I don’t think these dogs would exist in the forest somehow. They are manmade projections of repressed sexuality and the urge towards softness and tenderness.”

The artist’s arresting collages, made up of overlapping images from his personal milieu, create a staggering backdrop to his paintings and raise questions about the boundaries of originality. Highlighting the discrepancy between digital entertainment and analogue pleasure, the artworks challenge us to examine the insensate process of consuming beautiful content without truly experiencing it.

“The intention of the wallpaper behind the oil paintings is to recreate the sensory overload and paralysis of the mind that we experience when scrolling through TikTok, Instagram or Facebook,” Martin reflects. “At the end of image-bingeing, you haven’t really seen anything at all. By overwhelming the audience with information, I address the destruction of the internal guard that enables us to distinguish between right and wrong,



importance and unimportance. If we just let everything into our mind, it would surely melt away. Having an emotional border control is requisite for preserving our subconscious.”

The unconscious alchemic process of repetitive media-use introduces us to magic in a ritualistic sense too. “We’re holding a ray gun in our hand as we move from the metro to the toilet to our bed,” Martin says. “In magic, rituals have the ability to manifest. When you repeat a mantra or a spell, it’s not the words that make it strong, or even the meaning, it’s the seconds spent internalising the spoken imagery or, in this case, the hours spent scrolling.”

In his paintings, Martin collapses high and low culture, expressively

sabotaging the classic techniques of Renaissance art and Impressionism to render a vanitas for the digital age. With superficial lustre, the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death are expressed equally.

The paintings comprising ‘Karmageddon’ expand on Eder’s recent exhibition at Galería Hilario Galguera in Madrid: ‘No Hell Like an Old Hell’. Lifting a veil on the present-day hell, he suggests that we have been betrayed by traditions of perdition in traditional literature and biblical imagery. “Hell doesn’t contain demons and boiling water like in Blake’s drawings or Dante’s *Inferno*,” the artist suggests. “The new hell is existing right alongside us and it’s sugary; it’s sweet, it’s tender. Silence could be a new hell.”

The sense of silence and stillness in Eder’s paintings *No War* and *Siren* denotes Armageddon’s unheralded entrance. They’re foreboding yet uncannily calming.

“In a world that is loud, do you compete with it or do you give birth to the silence?” Eder asks. “I have never made paintings that are fast, I’m probably not even capable of it. The technique of painting is old and slow and the works rarely age. When you see a Caravaggio after 500 years, Bacchus still grins at you with his buxom grapes, long after the artist has died: ‘Look, I will survive you.’ When I’m painting, I consider that. Those vestiges remind us that in the eye of the storm, it is quiet.” <

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