

*Prolog* by Helin Alas extends the artist's interest in the structural conditions of the field of art and, in particular, its economies of individuality. The exhibition project, consisting of drawing, sculpture and text, maps out Alas' fictionalized biographical journey and personal observations. In these works, the genre of fantasy and its potential to unveil ideological circumstances rather than oppose reality manifests in a prophetic narrative of the artist's navigation through the art world.

At BPA// Raum, the installation structures the space into a stage-like scene. In the main space, the exhibition's centerpiece is mounted on the wall on a display made of two Eiermann tables of the kind found in studios and galleries. This large comic drawing, *Worlds and their Legends*, was commissioned by Alas and produced by the illustrator Dario Sostegni. His interpretations from outside art strongly inform these hyperbolic visualizations of the different characters, networks and perceived social codes that exist within: artists as a garden of plants, some whose fruits are ready to be picked as soon as they blossom; galleries in a glittering tower, emanating their radar for shooting stars and raw diamonds; institutions as fortresses where certain ideas of history, knowledge and power are perpetuated; critics, furnished with their special ingredients, squished onto a rowing boat; independent off-spaces, covered in snow, elusive, druggy, sceney; a jury, who ritualistically brew their magical mixtures over fire; and finally, the art fair as a circus-like market.

The protagonist, the prophetically "chosen one", is introduced in the second room of the exhibition space. Here, the cartoon drawing captures the artist as dressed to navigate the mapped-out landscape: she wears an astounding outfit, garnishing her with the power to present and perform an adequate image of herself, and a wooden magic stick, allowing her to conceive of artistic inventions without investment. A previous series by Alas, *Opening Looks* (2020–21), wherein the artist appropriates trending contemporary art scene "looks" and fashions using institutional funding for art materials, re-appears in the new series of works and offers additional "powers".

With *Prolog*, Alas constructs a vision wherein art's promise of transformation and autonomy is at odds with ossified social structures that reproduce inequalities. This contradiction, a kind of reclaiming of a systemic narrative, is emphasized and embodied in the rebelliously portrayed protagonist: in a move of empowerment, the artist takes on her own narrative and destiny, independent of the mixture of cultural and social capital, luck, confidence, performative skills, network and even schizophrenia (as evident in the knowledge and reflection of one's immersion in structures of exploitation versus one's boundless personal identification with one's labor) that is assumed necessary for survival; where the interrelating preconditions of class and socio-economic standing are still determining factors of success; and where claims to diversity and inclusion are often met with box-checking and reinforcements of expectations as well as limitations based on identity.

In *Worlds and their Legends*, the workings of an artistic landscape that harvests creativity as lucratively imagined creations born from nothing (as though magically), whilst overlooking the material but also emotional and social labor necessary, are exaggeratedly portrayed. *Prolog*, however, does not seek to promote a schematic "good versus evil" fight, a vision of the corrupted art world fought by the artist with a mandate to create critique and beauty. Rather, a humoristic stance of the artist-subject is here mobilized as a moment of distance vis-à-vis her own entanglements and involvements: it is a moment of self-difference between untethered creation, on the one hand, and undistanced mergence with institutional and social forces, on the other. Maybe here – in an awareness that the institution of art is not something "outside" but embodied by those participating in the field, shaping their respective desires and involvements – art harbors a potential for alterations.

*Prolog* reflects the mystification of art as a driving force for social change that is based on an obscurification of the principles of autonomy and freedom of the artist-figure. It unlocks the gap

between an idealization of art's potential and its inherent, systemic flaws – however, not without a twinkle of self-criticism in the artist's eye. As a prophetic introduction of auto-fictional events to come, the exhibition triggers a playful exploration into the question of how this gap might be reduced, with its first prediction manifesting in an institutionally orchestrated spell at Museum Brandhorst, Munich, in March 2022.

by Franziska Sophie Wildförster