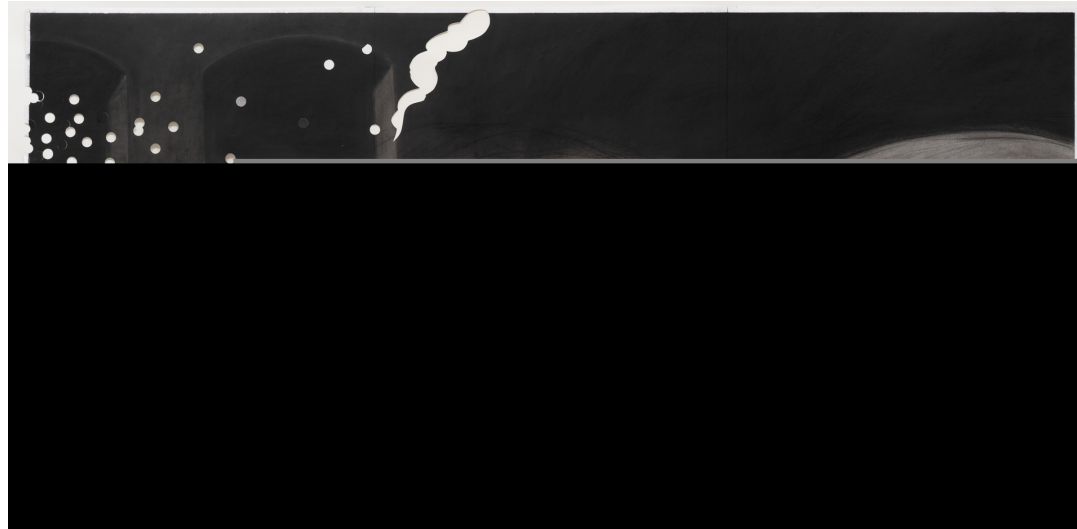




## *RUPRECHT VON KAUFMANN: The Three Princes of Serendip*



Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Der Stierkämpfer, 2019, Zeichnung, Kohle auf Papier, 210 x 100 cm

Ruprecht von Kaufmann's paintings, drawings and mixed media sculptures are filled with suspense and clues that spark and fire up your imagination. When I met the artist at the opening of his solo show at [Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery](#), our stimulating conversation zoomed in on his practice through the lens of this arresting exhibition and the meaning of 'chance' in art, a must-see.

Munich-born, L.A trained and Berlin-based artist Ruprecht von Kaufmann is known for the rich tapestry of meanings in his work [where time is hinted at from within: sketched lines, sub-hues make visible how the work had evolved before we see it in the flesh]



Ruprecht von Kaufmann, photo credit: Oliver Mark

Ruprecht's charcoal drawings are like the first few lines of a poem or a song that lets our eyes and minds wander and our imaginations fill the scene. They draw you in because they hint at something words cannot express, somewhere intangible, in-between spaces of mystery and enigma that we can't quite pinpoint but still are part of our lives: déjà-vu sensations, chance encounters: serendipity.

Inspired by the Persian tale that gave this exhibition its title "The Three Princes of Serendip", this series is a palimpsest of its own and an ode to the line, how it can conjure a silhouette, a gesture, a movement with such economy of means.

Less is so much more.

Ruprecht von Kaufmann takes us on visual journeys of the mind, unraveling threads of time that our interpretations can reconnect.

These drawings stop you in your tracks.

The surface of the paper lays bare time itself: the shreds and holes and layered lines and sub-hues disclose how each drawing came into being as it changed over time inside the artist's studio.

One line or hue leads on to the next in unexpected ways, like ricochets.

Serendipity here is imbedded in the creative process, chance encounters of charcoal with the paper as the work takes on a world of its own for us to marvel at.

The surprise effect lives on as we look into these works, into their depth and nuances:

The Three Princes of Serendip is a must-see show, on view at Kristin Hjellegjerde until the 22nd of February 2020.

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Rüstung, 2018 Charcoal on paper 100 x 70 cm

## *When the moon is a cold chiselled dagger*

How did it all start, what motivated you to become an artist?

I had never intended to become an artist. It felt less of an intentional choice than something I arrived at after not being able to circumvent the inevitable any longer.

A pivotal moment would be reading Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*.

I picked up the book at the library because I was curious what the controversy was all about, and it turned my world upside down.



Ruprecht von Kaufmann, *One*, 2018, ÖlBild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 122,5 cm, Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Photo credit: Adrian Sereni

It was the first book I had read that opened up an entirely different world, a world that was still connected to our own, but where strange things could just happen, such as two people falling out of an airplane at twenty thousand feet and still managing to survive....I felt that in art anything could be possible.

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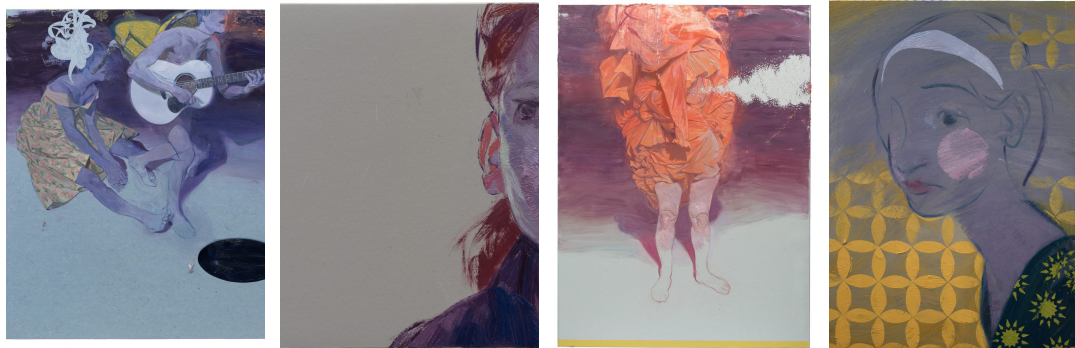
*I always wanted my paintings to make others feel just the way I did when reading Rushdie's book.*

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Der letzte Akt, 2019, Ölbild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 184 cm

Space, air, fire, water, earth... which of these elements would you choose in relation to your practice and yourself, and why?

A curious choice here: space doesn't seem to fit this alchemistic understanding of the four elements. But actually space is the one I would choose as it plays a pivotal role in my work.

The emotional impact of my work, the instant sense of empathy it can create is crucial for me. That to a large extent is generated through spatial arrangements, or how figures relate to the surrounding space in a composition. In my work I think a lot about how to create spaces, and also how a painting, or sculpture can transform the space that it will be shown in.



Babe I´m gonna leave you, Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 122,5 cm | Flüchtige Begegnung, 2019, Ölbild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 20 x 20 cm | Bolero, 2017, Öl auf Linoleum auf Aluminium, 205 x 150 cm | Gute alte Zeit, 2107, Öl auf Linoleum 40 x 30 cm

### *Serendipity or Premonition?*

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*‘There is no chance ; everything is ordeal, or punishment, or reward, or foresight.’ (Voltaire)*

The story of The Three Princes of Serendip also inspired Voltaire's 1747 novella Zadig. The closest in French for 'serendipity' is 'hasard' in the sense of something unexplained and unexpected, which Voltaire does not believe exists.

How do you relate to this idea of chance in your work and on a more philosophical level, in life?

With all due respect for Voltaire who was one of the greatest thinkers humanity has brought us, I do disagree on this point because premonition is not something I truly believe in. Even if you do believe that things are preordained, we can't know about these, so as a result they must feel random to us while we experience them.



Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Mein Traum, 2019, Ölbild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 20 x 20 cm

I think that life is almost always a matter of 'happenstance' -chance encounters and, well, serendipity. This is really what makes the creative process interesting and fun, when you stumble across new insights as you are working on something.

Just yesterday I finished a painting that I changed substantially three times. The previous versions were OK, but they didn't feel special or poignant enough.

So I painted over the work again and again until I came eye-to-eye with the composition that finally seemed right. It sure wasn't the one I had planned initially though.





Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Der Zeuge, 2018, Ölbild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 122,5 cm | This is our last Good Bye, 2018, Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 122,5 cm

The lack of anything unsuspected or unexplained in the world presupposes that humans are rational beings, but they really aren't.

We think of ourselves as rational, but it's been proven time and time again that we just follow our instincts which are often the remnants of an evolutionary history and have nothing to do with rational decision making.

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*If we were, we would by now have tried to do something about the destruction of our planet. That would be rational.*

I don't believe in the existence of a creator either who would know and pre-determine what our lives have in store for us. If there was one, he most likely threw rocks down a hillside and lost interest in watching the resulting avalanche.

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, In the House, 2017, Öl auf Linoleum auf Aluminium, 200 x 750 cm

### *Black wings and the Authority of black*

Do you have in mind a poem or word of wisdom that sparks your imagination the most?

I love the lyrics to the song Black Wings by Tom Waits. So many lines that spark images of entire paintings in my mind. I also love how open the song is, how you can't be entirely sure what the song is all about. Having said that, it feels like it is circling around something that I would call 'truth' – a term that for sure triggers all kinds of discussions.

## "Black Wings"

Take an eye for an eye  
 Take a tooth for a tooth  
 Just like they say in the Bible  
 Never leave a trace or forget a face  
 Of any man at the table  
 When the moon is a cold chiselled dagger  
 Sharp enough to draw blood from a stone  
 He rides through your dreams on a coach  
 And horses and the fence posts  
 In the midnight look like bones

Well they've stopped trying to hold him  
 With mortar, stone and chain  
 He broke out of every prison  
 Boots mount the staircase  
 The door is flung back open  
 He's not there for he has risen  
 He's not there for he has risen

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Der Code, 2018, Charcoal on paper 100 × 70 cm

Well he once killed a man with a guitar string  
 He's been seen at the table with kings  
 Well he once saved a baby from drowning  
 There are those who say beneath his coat there are wings  
 Some say they fear him  
 Others admire him  
 Because he steals his promise  
 One look in his eye  
 Everyone denies  
 Ever having met him  
 Ever having met him

He can turn himself into a stranger  
 Well they broke a lot of canes on his hide  
 he was born away in a cornfield  
 A fever beats in his head like a drum inside  
 Some say they fear him  
 Others admire him  
 Because he steals his promise  
 One look in his eye  
 Everyone denies  
 Ever having met him  
 Ever having met him

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, The Avant Garde, 2018, Charcoal on paper, 100 × 70 cm

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*'I like the authority of black. It is a colour that does not compromise. A violent hue but one which still encourages introspection, both a colour and a non colour. When the light is reflected in the black, it transforms it, transmutes it. It opens up its own mind field.'* (Pierre Soulages)

In light of your use of charcoal in your work, what does the colour or tone of black evoke for you?

Great quote... and amusing that you started your question with 'in light of' because, of course charcoal is the antithesis to light. Black is

not light, rather the lack of light, the absorption of light, and therefore a non colour, because it doesn't emit light waves -at least ideally.

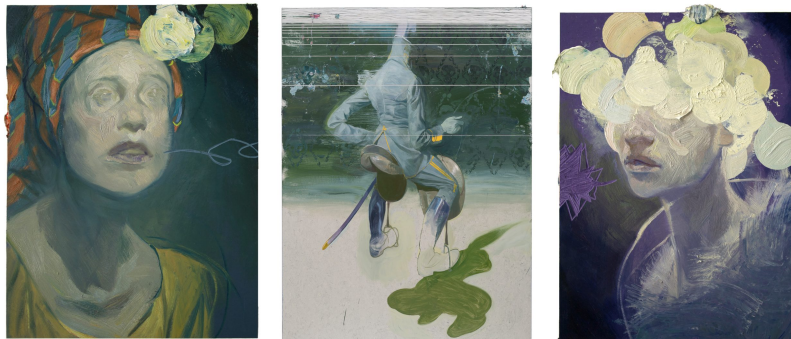
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*But of course as is often the case in painting, that, too, is an illusion. There is no black colour that absorbs all light entirely.*

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, The Old Fashioned, 2018, Charcoal on paper, 100 x 70 cm

And that's what makes this so fascinating: how black and white images of course evoke colour, making us fill in the colour in our minds. Since our brains translate quite abstract marks on a sheet of paper into a recognisable form, so the image is something that happens in the viewers' brain, not on the paper.

Black and white also relate to history: we are used to seeing early photographs and films in black and white. With the invention of photography, the world was seen in black and white. I recently watched a documentary with early colour films from just before the first World War, quite a surprise to see it all in colour!



Die Wild West Show, 2019, Ölbild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 184 cm | Followers, 2017, Öl auf Linoleum, 40 x 30 cm | Radezky Marsch, 2017, Öl auf Linoleum auf Aluminium, 205 x 150 cm | Leaders, 2017, Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 40 x 30 cm

What parallels do you see between your approach to sculpture and the way you draw?

When I draw, I don't think in two dimensions. For me it feels like my hand is moving in space around the form I am drawing.

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*'There is a 'behind the form' in my mind.*

The same actually occurs in the sculptures in this exhibition. The lines that are 'drawn' by the edges of the stencils curve around the head and disappear behind another shape pushing to the front of the form. So it's mentally very much the same process.

Ruprecht von Kaufmann, Die Alm, 2019, Ölbild Öl auf Linoleum auf Holz, 153 x 245 cm



## RUPRECHT VON KAUFMANN: The Three Princes Of Serendip

If you could change something in the art world, what would it be?

I would take money out of it. Of course, that's impossible, but the market values of artworks distort how they are being perceived.

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*We have been for so long now bombarded with the propaganda of the capitalist society, that how we value anything, is determined by its monetary worth.*

The art critic Robert Hughes in his film *The Mona Lisa Curse* points out that his was the last generation that went to a museum without one of their first thoughts upon encountering a piece of art being: 'I wonder how much that would cost'.

### RUPRECHT VON KAUFMANN

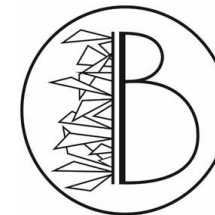
#### THE THREE PRINCES OF SERENDIP

18 January – 22 Februar 2020

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Photo credit: Stefan Maria Rother and Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery

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