

Volker Stelzmann

What Is to Be Done?

Paintings and Etchings

Opening: Thursday, 5th March 2020, 6–9 p.m.

Introduction (around 7 p.m.): Dr. Sebastian Preuss,

Senior Editor, *Weltkunst*

The artist will be present.

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Tues – Sat, 12 am to 6 pm

and by appointment

Exhibition from 6th March to 18th April 2020, extended until 13th June 2020

Volker Stelzmann, born in 1940 in Dresden, has been represented by Galerie Poll for over thirty years. His solo exhibition *What Is to Be Done?*, named after his painting of the same name from 2019, shows paintings from the past three years as well as etchings from the years 1972 to 2004. It marks the beginning of tributes to the painter, illustrator, and graphic artist on the occasion of his eightieth birthday in November. Among them: a joint exhibition organized by the Angermuseum Erfurt and the Kunsthalle Schweinfurt that will open at the end of August.

“I am interested – to put it very broadly – in the people of our time, in their relationship to themselves, to each other, and to the world” (Volker Stelzmann, 1973). To this day, human beings have been the central subject of Stelzmann’s images, which show society’s changing sensitivities and life situations in delicately iridescent colours and subtle constellations of figures. The painting style and composition of works by V.S. – to use his monogram – are influenced by his study of the Italian Mannerists (Pontormo), Old Masters from Germany (Baldung Grien, Grünewald), and Otto Dix. But in the end, each painting is based on Stelzmann’s precise observation of his environment and his intention to produce a picture of his times. It seems to us that we know his characters’ clothes, accessories, and hairstyles only too well, but with these familiar details Stelzmann succeeds in developing a cosmos of his own: “The soft sensuality of his painterly language, the stretched, twisted individuals in his paintings, who sometimes ... even fly about within the picture, the cool yet magical mood, the expressive yet frozen faces – all this creates a pictorial world governed by rules of its own” (Sebastian Preuss).

Stelzmann repeatedly chooses Biblical motifs for his enigmatic parables and allegories. The eight-part series *The Messengers* from 2018 features the twelve apostles in contemporary

outfits on small-format panels. Stelzmann's etchings – a technique that he has mastered down to the last detail, in all of its subtleties – take religious themes such as resurrection or visitation as their subject.

Two self-portraits, *Self in Front of Blue* and *Self with Masks*, from 2019 and 2018, complete the survey being shown at the Galerie Poll. Stelzmann has been cultivating this genre of painting from the beginning of his career. Appearing several times in an extremely narrow landscape format, the artist holds colourful Venetian masks in front of his face; their various types refer to the themes of carnival, acrobatics, and the circus – motifs which Stelzmann is fond of treating.

Volker Stelzmann studied from 1963 to 1968 at the Academy of Fine Arts (Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst) in Leipzig, where he taught from 1975 to 1986, with an appointment as professor from 1982 onward. In 1986 he used a large exhibition of his works at the Staatliche Kunsthalle in West Berlin to leave the GDR. After a guest professorship at the Städelschule Frankfurt am Main in 1987/1988, in 1988 he was appointed professor at the West Berlin University of the Arts (HdK, today: the Berlin University of the Arts). He taught there until his retirement in 2006. Galerie Poll presented its first solo exhibition of Volker Stelzmann in 1988. Works by the artist are held in numerous public and private collections. Volker Stelzmann lives and works in Berlin.