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Annelies Štrba. Madonnas

20 August to 19 October 2014
Opening: Tuesday, 19 August 2014, 6 p.m.

Light, colour and a touch of magic are the ingredients of Swiss artist Annelies Štrba's fairytale images of the Madonna. Enchanted, even as a young child, by images of the Mother of God, Štrba has never lost her fascination for this theme. For Štrba, the Virgin Mary is the ur-image of every woman and mother, and the ultimate symbol of femininity. She is an icon in the truest sense of the word.

In the two series presented here – one on canvas, the other printed on paper – we see a reflection of Štrba's intense exploration of one of the oldest Christian topoi in its most concentrated form. For years, the artist has been photographing Marian images in churches and chapels, only to subject them to her own creative transformation. She courageously breaks with established ways of seeing and, like a magician, plays with the observer's own perceptions. Instead of reaching for paint and brush, Štrba uses the computer as the indispensable magic tool by which she creates her so-called light paintings. Štrba's works are the product of an exuberant experimentation with alienation, adaptation, distortion and an incursion into unfamiliar and uncharted worlds of colour.

Madonnas by Old Masters from the collection of Prints and Drawings ETH Zurich, striking in their stylistic and iconographic diversity, enhance this exhibition: Martin Schongauer's *Virgin and Child in a Courtyard* (c.1470-1482) portrays the Infant Jesus gently cradled in his Mother's lap, with halos clearly identifying the element of the divine. Lucas van Leyden's *Virgin and Child Beneath a Tree* (1514), by contrast, eschews all such attributes of divinity. Israel van Meckenem presents the *Virgin on the Crescent Moon* (1502), as described in the *Apocalypse of St John*, emerging victorious over the forces of evil. Clad in sumptuous robes, she is crowned Queen of Heavens by angels.

The exhibition combines the historical diversity of Marian portrayals with Annelies Štrba's contemporary take on an almost two thousand year old Christian iconographic tradition. The artist uses modern technical media to bring the image of the Madonna into the present day. Though removed from their original religious context, Štrba's Marian images lose nothing of their transcendental aura. On the contrary: the transformation, far from diminishing their transcendence, actually highlights it in a new and unexpected way.

For further information and visual material, please contact Konstanze Forst-Battaglia, curator of the exhibition: Tel. 044/632 78 76 or Mail konstanze.forst-battaglia@gs.ethz.ch