



**Martín Mele**  
**“The Boy Who Followed Mele”**  
**April 1–May 20, 2023**

In 1956, American author Patricia Highsmith presented the ominous Thomas Phelps Ripley for the first time, the charming antihero of a total of five novels. In *The Boy Who Followed Ripley* (1980), the fourth book in the series, the young runaway Frank meets the talented con-artist Tom Ripley. Hired by the younger man, Ripley gets caught up in the dark underworld of Cold War West Berlin. He gets drawn into a strange plot of abduction that transforms the ice-cold, amoral Ripley into a generous and empathetic protector. Tom discovers in the younger man an earlier incarnation of himself, who became a murderer quite similarly, more due to circumstances than intention. While Ripley soon puts his deeds behind him, Frank is plagued by guilt for his offense. Highsmith also puts the readers in a moral dilemma: despite his criminal involvement, Ripley has a loveable, quite human side that we can all identify with. But his true identity is much more complex: Ripley is a master of manipulation whose actual intentions remain concealed behind a carefully constructed mask of respectability.

Martín Mele moves in an equally captivating and ambiguous world. The current exhibition at Galerie Mark Müller takes us on a wild journey along with Argentinian artist. Searching for his genealogical and artistic ancestors, it's not only about taking a look toward the past, we also find ourselves in the artist's immediate present. We become acquainted with Mele's colorfully oscillating universe, and at individual junctures with the artist himself. In a certain sense, this might seem like a game of hide and seek, but the magic in this case inheres not primarily in what escapes our vision. Instead, it's all about the various layers of representation that are inherent to the individual works reveal themselves, sometimes more, sometimes less. They point to their materiality and their artifice, their mutability and temporality, their referentiality and reflection of the artist's past and present.

Various forms, materials, and surfaces are placed along the walls, on the exposed concrete floor, or hang from the gallery ceiling. This variety can inspire or overwhelm, and, at the same time, the individual sculptural objects and images serve in their plurality as a key to one another. As *mise en abyme*, images within an image, the works create intertextual links and refer to one another, to themselves, or to something else by way of their form, content, or title. The narratives that Martín Mele orchestrates here overlap and are superimposed on top of one another, resulting in a complex network of contexts and metatexts that places itself across the entire exhibition space, full of illusions, layering, and (self) referentiality.



The narrow black wavy line that repeats in several places refers to the mustache of the surrealist artist Salvador Dalí. The characteristically eccentric mustache rendered in fabric is hung directly on the wall (*Los Bigotes de Dalí*, 2023) and returns in the form of a large, framed photographic print and a smaller print on dibond (*Moustache de Dalí*, 2023; *Untitled*, 2023). Mele continues the curved lines in several elements of artificial leather filled with sand. Due to their construction, the works are movable and mutable: they lie precariously on top of two aluminum balls, allow themselves to collapse into two glowing yellow, mobile metal stands, support one another or embrace the two ornamental wall hooks (*Toblerone*, 2023; *Würdenträger*, 2023; *Die goldene Wurst*, 2023; *Fliegende Nonne*, 2023). These hooks appear once again in the two large-format, gray-black “drawings” of the artist’s studio wall (*At Night*, 2023; *Zeichnung (Ohne Titel)*, 2023). The scraps of textile that Mele gets from Buenos Aires, just like the artificial leather, are used to create various masks. They are masks that on the one hand subtly “mask” aspects of the artist himself (*Untitled*, 2023). At the same time, the various fabrics on wooden stilts with round plaster feet appear as a colorful army under the quite cynical motto “Enjoy life today,” as one of the T-shirts proclaims. On the front wall, we look at eleven photographed textile faces behind reflective planes of Plexiglas. The visible traces of the fabric, each spot, lint, or tear, give the masks a life of their own that spins a new saga on their original and current existence.

Martín Mele’s broad fragmentary repertoire of materials is nevertheless accompanied by a sense of continuity and coherence. Here, the works seem to question and comment upon their own role as representation, as original or reproduction, as reality or fiction. They tell humorous and serious stories that are based on our individual human experiences and are closely accompanied by a form of self-reflexivity. This is precisely where the artist comes in: with each exhibition, he observes himself, his immediate surroundings in search of his changing biography and identity. He looks back to the footprints of the past, which at the same time lead to the future. “The Boy Who Followed Mele” is an invitation to follow the artist in his tracks and to fill the carefully constructed gaps with our own personal references or a wink of the eye.

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April 2023