

Guðmundur Thoroddsen FATHER'S FATHERS

ASYA
GEISBERG
GALLERY



Oculi Quatuor, Four Eyes, 2011. Acrylic on wood, 20" x 11".

January 12 - February 18, 2012

Asya Geisberg Gallery is pleased to present "Father's Fathers", the first New York solo exhibition of wood sculpture and works on paper by Icelandic artist Guðmundur Thoroddsen. With a chainsaw and crude hand axe, Thoroddsen crafts bearded heads, sometimes with absurdly geometric hirsuteness. Abstracted amalgamations of Sumerian or Viking gods, the heads are hapless, passive, even useless anachronistic deities, forming a pantheon of false idols.

Including a bust of his father, an impish self-portrait, and ruminative ink drawings, Thoroddsen's work hosts a variety of questions about our reliance on masculine ideals and our often unquestioned expectations of leaders. Have we outgrown our need for patriarchs, omnipotent gods, or feared autocratic strongmen? With Qaddafi and Mubarak dismissed and Putin's support cracking, young generations search for a new vision of leadership. With Kim Jong-Il referred to as "our Father", can gender finally achieve equality and equanimity, while our cultural prototypes remain embedded in our collective psyche? Even within Scandinavia's contemporary progressivism, Thoroddsen sees strict dichotomies carved into each sector of life: within familial, economic or social roles.

Trained as a painter, Thoroddsen began working with wood as a personal exploration of masculinity. The roughly chopped and cracked surface suggests that taking up woodcarving was an attempt at being a "manly man", a wistful evocation of a brawny woodsman. After the death of his authoritarian father, the artist came to question his own relationship to manliness, and saw everywhere the same focus on patriarchal ideals. By creating a smaller-than-life bust, he literally cut his father down to size. Seeking broader universal symbols, Thoroddsen began to chart aesthetic representations in Greek, Near-eastern and Norse mythology, culminating in carved heads that smirked at their historic antecedents.

In drawings and sculptures of god-figures urinating, squatting, or made out of horse excrement, Thoroddsen is like a little boy doodling and defacing sacred symbols. He exposes the gods at their most vulnerable and undignified, kicking them off their pedestals. They instantly seem comical, and sacrilegiously profane. Outlined explicitly but watery within and at times cartoonish, the ink drawings have an ease that belies their maker's seriousness. As Thoroddsen says in an imaginary conversation with his patriarchs: "Look, you've had your time. Some of it was good, some bad, it was all pretty unjust and now it's time for something else. We will give you a nice goodbye party."

*Born in Iceland, **Guðmundur Thoroddsen** studied at the Kunsthochschule Berlin, the Iceland Academy of Arts, and received his MFA from SVA in New York. Currently based in Reykjavik, Thoroddsen has been included in numerous exhibitions in New York, Reykjavik, Stockholm, Berlin, and Helsinki, including "This is Then" at DODGE Gallery (2011), "Fragmentation" curated by Dan Cameron (2011), and "Colorsynthesis" at the Reykjavik Art Museum (2010). His work appears in "Icelandic Art History from late 19th Century to Early 21st Century" (2011), as well as the New Museum's "Younger Than Jesus: Artist Directory" (2009). He is the recipient of a 2011 Icelandic Art Center grant.*

Icelandic
Art Center

Special thanks to the Icelandic Art Center.