

Advertisement

Frieze

Reviews /

Luís Lázar Matos Re-Imagines The Legacy Of The Fairytale King

[!\[\]\(c3d993ca47bfe2a953c700506ce31fa0_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(c468cde8f04e2e2a6ba3c2a373e05c45_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(bb556800b100164a948e6987b050d670_img.jpg\)](#) [!\[\]\(3cc1da747298690f15ddc84b775791a4_img.jpg\)](#)

BY MATTHEW MCLEAN

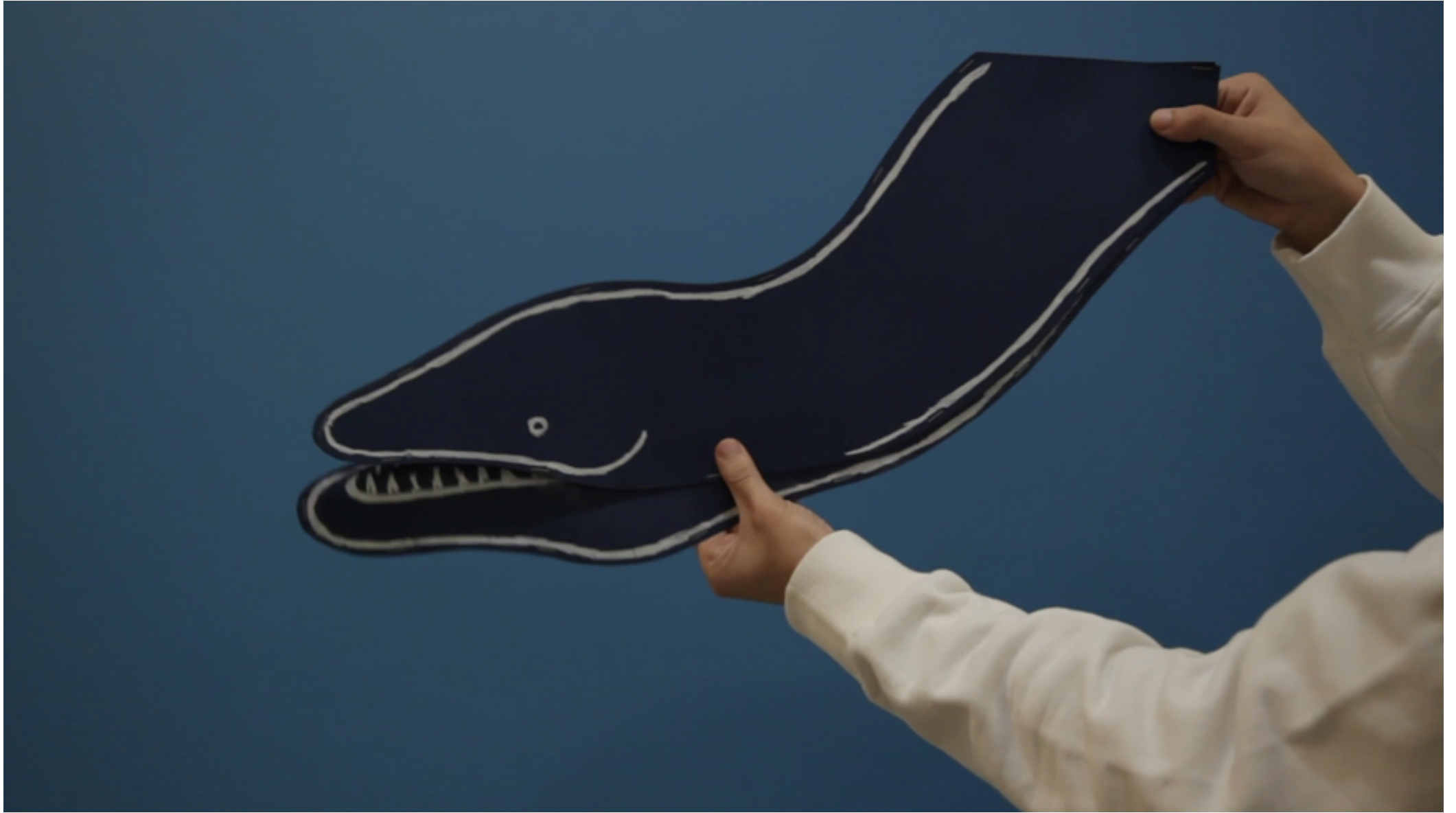
14 AUG 2018

Finding Trump-aping parallels with the extravagant, tragic story of Ludwig II, at Madragoa, Lisbon



The title of Luís Lázaro Matos's show, 'Tomber dans le lac' (literally, 'To Fall into the Lake'), refers to Ludwig II of Bavaria's mysterious 1886 death in the waters of Lake Würm (now Starnburger See). During his reign, the eccentric king was determined to establish Bavaria's national greatness through cultural projects. For all his grandiosity – he created a grotto lit by coloured electric lights in which, from a scallop-shaped barge, he could listen to Wagner – Ludwig was largely powerless as a monarch. When his spending became unconscionable, he was declared

insane by his ministers. His corpse was found just three days later. No coincidence, then, that in colloquial French, 'tomber dans le lac' also means 'to fail'.



Luís Lázaro Matos, *Tomber Dans Le Lac*, 2018, HD video still. Courtesy: the artist and Madragoa, Lisbon

The cold *realpolitik* undergirding Ludwig's fairy-tale world was alluded to by the work at the show's entrance, a pastel diptych (2015), replicating in one panel Ludwig's 1865 coronation portrait by Ferdinand von Piloty and, in the other, its mirror image. The artist renders the whole thing in cool Prussian blue – a shade that evokes the waters of the titular lake but which also refers obliquely to Prussia, the state that, bent on a path to German unification, bought Bavaria's acquiescence with the funds of Ludwig's projects. We might make our self-images, the work suggests, even extravagantly so, but we do so not in palettes of our own choosing.

In the above portrait, one of Ludwig's hands is replaced by an eel. The links between this creature and the king are never made explicit but it seems not irrelevant to me that the eel's sexual habits were, until the discovery of breeding grounds in the Sargasso Sea in the early 20th century, subject of fantastic speculation. The composite eel-king forms the exhibition's recurring motif. A wide acrylic painting depicts a dead eel floating upside down in a lake, his mouth in a rictus grin under the moonlight. Besides this, a video shows an eel-shaped puppet, a simple cardboard cut-out, manipulated by a conspicuously human operator. In an extraordinary poem-cum-oration, the puppet narrates a story which echoes and merges with Ludwig's own: eschewing reproduction ('What did you want of me? A married fish? Laying out eggs in pairs?'), withdrawing from a sea of troubles ('I remember watching shamefully quiet from the windows of my tower') into a self-indulgent realm of alluring, if shallow, pictorial control ('The cave of privilege offered me great comfort with its aesthetics').

Advertisement



Luís Lázaro Matos, 'Tomber Dans Le Lac', 2018, installation view, Madragoa, Lisbon. Courtesy: the artist and Madragoa, Lisbon



The image of the sealed aesthetic retreat is explored further in a series of works on paper (2018) hung in the upstairs gallery against walls muralled with underwater scenes of coral, squid, reeds, German slang words for gay men and crude, Trump-aping exhortations to 'Make Bavaria Great Again'. In these works, architectural elevations of Neuschwanstein – the model for the Disney castle – are overdrawn in crosshatched blue marker with giant male figures, innocent ogres who take the castle's foundations for their seats and stools. The intersection of body and building might be read as sublimation: the desire for physical contact driving such grand, lonely projects. But, to me, the idea presented is rather the opposite: as an extension of the self, such theatrical constructions offer an experience of the touched, a setting for an indefinite extension of a pose, perfectly controlled and choreographed, like an Instagram moment fixed for eternity. A chance to remain, as the eel-king in the video says, forever 'the most perfect moray behind a liquid screen'. 'Everyone knows', Jacques Lacan mentions in his 1964 seminar, 'that reality consists in not letting oneself be touched.' Like Lacan, Matos's imaging of Ludwig's legacy leaves bracingly open-ended the question of whether that untouched state is one to be tragically desired or sadly endured.

Luís Lázaro Matos: 'Tomber dans le lac' <<https://www.galeriamadragoa.pt/2018>> was on view at Madragoa, Lisbon, from 16 May until 25 August 2018.

Main image: Luís Lázaro Matos, Tomber Dans Le Lac, 2015, pastel on paper in artist frame, 2.2 × 1.6 m, each. Courtesy: the artist and Madragoa, Lisbon

MATTHEW MCLEAN

Matthew McLean is Senior Editor, Frieze Studios, based in London, UK.

First published in Issue 197
September 2018

Share this:    

Reviews /

LUÍS LÁZARO MATOS

MATTHEW MCLEAN

MADRAGOA

LISBON

London

1 Surrey Street
London
WC2R 2ND, UK
+44 (0)203 372 6111

New York

247 Centre St
5th Floor
New York, NY 10013
+1 212 463 7488

Berlin

Zehdenicker Str. 28
D-10119 Berlin
Germany
+49 30 2362 6506



Smile You Are In Spain Studio Part II, 2017, (installation view at Arco Madrid)

Luís Lázaro Matos has just moved into an apartment in a modernist building from the 1950s, off the busy Rua Morais Soares, in the Penha de França neighbourhood. It will double as his workspace. It's a week since he signed the lease, and we find him busy painting the walls white and assembling furniture, and trying to do it all as quickly as possible, so that he can get back to his real work, as well as his personal life. Nevertheless he shows us around, describing the function that each of the rooms will serve: the room in which he will draw, paint and test ideas for murals and other largescale works; the room in which he will keep his archive and books. He also shows us his bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen and a meal nook with a huge window.

Lázaro Matos is a bit of a multitasker, and even without a studio he has been working simultaneously on several things, including an artist publication bringing together the two-part project *Smile You Are in Spain Studio* (2017). The project originated with the slogan 'Smile! You are in Spain', used in a five-year tourism campaign; Lázaro Matos mashed it up with Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893–1910). The stereotypical 'fiesta' associated with tourism in Spain finds its antithesis in the suffering portrayed by the figure in the painting, playfully investigating

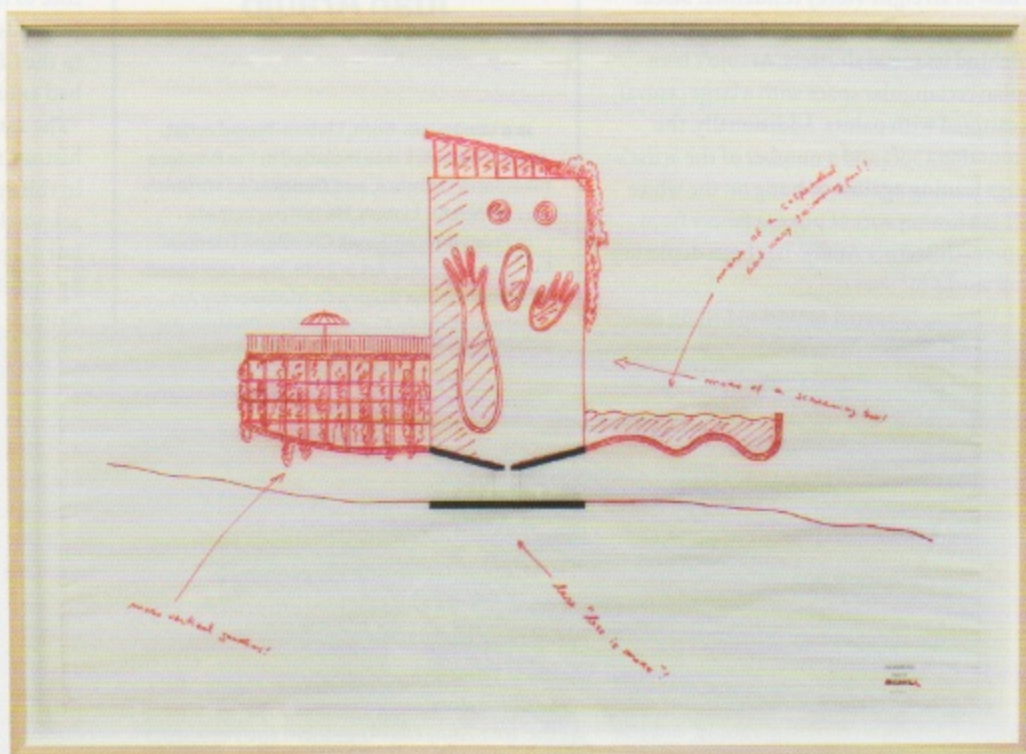
Luís Lázaro Matos

lives and works in Lisbon. His work has recently been on show at Madragoa, Lisbon, and Kunsthalle Lissabon, and was included in 10000 years later between Venus and Mars at the Galeria Municipal do Porto and Debaixo do seu nariz at Gare Marítima da Rocha Conde d'Óbidos, Lisbon. He is represented by Madragoa.

the way in which clichés and emblems of countries become marketable commodities ready to be consumed by the global masses. Part one was presented as a solo show at Lisbon's Galeria Madragoa, while the second part materialised as a performative installation presented at last year's Arco Madrid fair. There the artist could be found making architectural drawings of hypothetical holiday villas inspired by Munch's painting. Once finished, each red-ink drawing of a villa was placed on the booth's wall, over a largescale mural depicting multiple clones of Munch's figure

inside a red-tinted tropical swimming pool. Architecture has been an important way for Lázaro Matos to express himself, and by live-drawing models of summer houses that quote both the sentiment of despair and the actual character in *The Scream*, he ironically and humorously brings awareness to the randomness and borderline psychosis of becoming a contemporary tourist. The publication will be launched in May, coinciding with Lázaro Matos's next gallery show, which is due to occupy Madragoa's two exhibition spaces and bring together, using the same strategy of juxtaposition evident in *Smile You Are in Spain Studio*, the historical narrative of the eccentric Ludwig II of Bavaria, moray eels and online trolling.

These projects sum up the central themes of Lázaro Matos: that of the figure of the dilettante, to which he has always been drawn; architecture, as a way of imagining the world otherwise, in a more extravagant, playful, even dysfunctional fashion; and animals, or anthropomorphised versions of them, as a way of investigating human psyche and humorously reacting against the man–beast binary. Through them, in his own very idiosyncratic, absurd way, the artist comments on the world around him. *Luís Silva & João Mourão*



Model for a Holiday Villa in Spain #14 (Less and More!), 2017, marker on printed vegetal paper, paper, 92 × 127 cm



Model for a Holiday Villa, 2017, graphite, marker and tracing paper on paper dyptic, 205 × 148 cm (each), framed
all images Courtesy the artist and Madragoa, Lisbon