



Navigation by then 10-year-old Arthur Rimbaud (1865), graphite and ink on paper, 7.3 x 7.6 cm

As is the case in Omid Delafrouz's early work, it is instantly apparent in *Plaisirs du Jeune Âge* that the mythologies of childhood are of interest to him.

The detail of the outstretched hand comes from the drawing *Navigation* which poet Arthur Rimbaud created as a child. The drawing depicts two boys lying down in a boat with both arms raised over their heads, one of them even screaming for help. But rest assured, there is no real danger here and what the viewer sees is an image of a boyish prank on a boat.

The drawing of this boat ride has been interpreted as foreboding of the poem that Rimbaud came to write as a 16-year-old - *Le Bateau Ivre* (*The Drunken Boat*) where the boat is a personification of the young poet himself, out on stormy seas. A hint of the literary Modernism that Rimbaud came to initiate with this poem.

In 2017, Sotheby's sold this drawing together with six others under the presumed title of *Plaisirs du Jeune Âge* (*Pleasures of Young Age*). The auction house emphasized innocent fun while Omid Delafrouz has a different reading of the drawing. His painting centres Rimbaud's scrawled hand like a mast without sails and a desolate omen of impending distress and doom.



Description

Rimbaud, Arthur
 Plaisirs du jeune âge. 7 dessins manuscrits autographes. [1865.]
 plume et crayon

In 2017, the drawing was sold as part of a series at Sotheby's

Plaisirs du Jeune Âge



Plaisirs du Jeune Âge by Omid Delafrouz (2021), oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm

Friede - Am Hang des Ettersberg



Photograph from 1944 of Goethe's Oak in the concentration camp at Buchenwald. Photographed in secret by the French prisoner Georges Angueli



Bell krater depicting the death of hunter Aktaion, from ca 470 B.C.



Press photograph from 1938 of UK prime minister Neville Chamberlain holding up the peace treaty with Nazi Germany at Heston airport

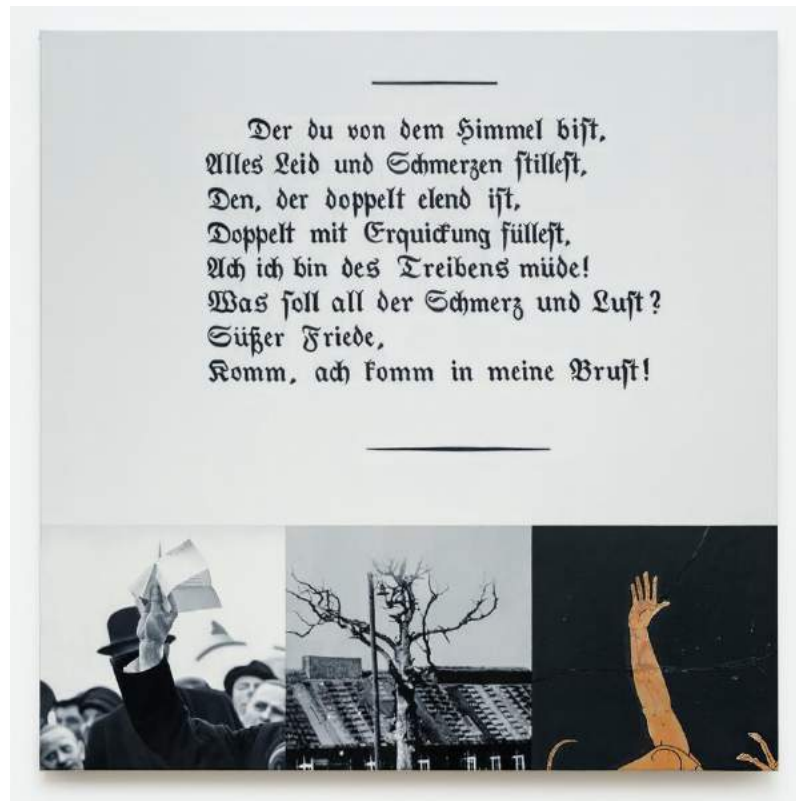
Der du von dem Himmel bist,
Alles Leid und Schmerzen
stillest,
Den, der doppelt elend ist,
Doppelt mit Erquickung füllest;
Ach, ich bin des Treibens müde!
Was soll all der Schmerz und
Lust?
Süßer Friede,
Komm, ach komm in meine
Brust!

Thou that from the heavens art,
Every pain and sorrow stillest,
And the doubly wretched heart
Doubly with refreshment fillest,
I am weary with contending!
Why this rapture and unrest?
Peace descending
Come, ah, come into my
breast!^[2]

Wanderer's Nightsong (1776) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in German and with an English translation

The painting *Friede - Am Hang des Ettersberg* refers to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem *Wanderer's Nightsong* about his love for an already married woman who lived in Buchenwald ("Beech forest"). The poem expresses a dream of peace but how Goethe can only dare to dream of peace through death. According to legend, the poem was written on the slope of Ettersberg in the beech forest, under an oak tree called Goethe's Oak. This oak became a powerful symbol, having many different meanings, one of them being a representation of the self-image of the nation as a stronghold of high-culture. The tree became mythical and it was believed that when the oak falls, so does Germany.

Omid Delafrouz's reading of Goethe's poem is as a monstrous premonition of the collapse of Europe. Hitler eventually felled the beech forest but saved Goethe's oak to hang prisoners in. The tree caught fire in 1944 and less than a year later, Germany surrendered.



Friede - Am Hang des Ettersberg by
Omid Delafrouz (2021-2022),
oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm

In the painting, Omid Delafrouz has also included a section of the press photo taken in 1938 of the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. The picture is taken after he signed The Munich Agreement - an agreement between Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Italy in which Czechoslovakia was sacrificed to Germany. Neville Chamberlain waved the paper with everyone's signatures on it and later assured that this entailed "peace for our time".

A parallel is drawn between this peace treaty and Goethe's oak tree, which has lost its leaves in the painting. Goethe's poem grew from the tree and peace through death was also what was fulfilled through the Munich Agreement. However, there was no moral high ground to stand on when Czechoslovakia, without their consent, was sacrificed for one's own peace.

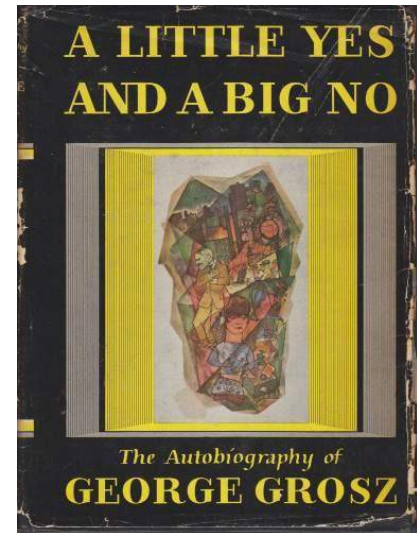
Finally, Omid Delafrouz also finds relevance in Greek mythology. More specifically, in the story of how the hunting goddess Diana bathes with her friends and is seen in an unclothed state by another hunter, Aktaion. Diana is so outraged by this that she punishes Aktaion by turning him into prey for his own hunting dogs. The hunter becomes hunted and then realizes what it feels like to be prey, but by then it is too late for change.

Just like in the first photo taken of the Earth from space, this is about viewing oneself at a distance and truly seeing oneself for the first time. In Omid Delafrouz's painting, Aktaion's distressed arm is juxtaposed with Goethe's naked oak.

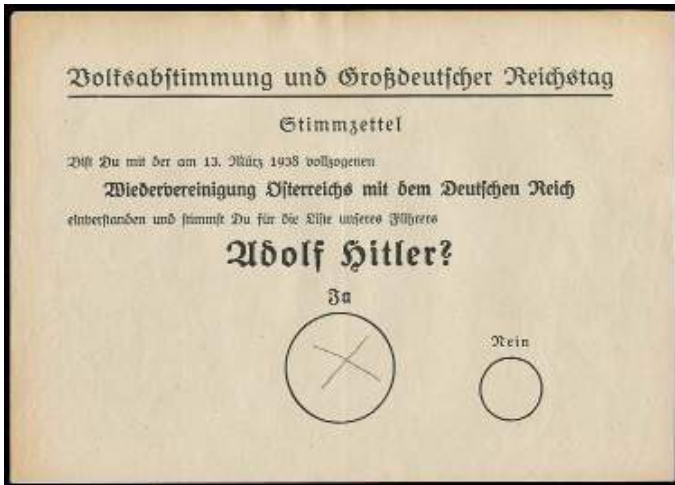
Groß' Yes 1946



Groß' Yes 1946 by Omid Delafrouz (2021), oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm



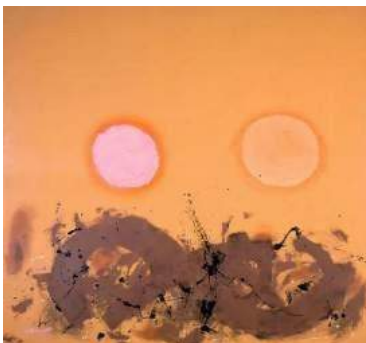
The autobiography of George Grosz, published in English in 1946



German election ballot from 1938



Flurry by Adolph Gottlieb (1967), silkscreen print, 56 x 76 cm



Recurring motif in the painting of Adolph Gottlieb



It was made clear how to cast one's vote in Germany in 1938

Groß' Yes 1946

Do you agree with the reunification of Austria with the German Empire as adopted on March 13, 1938 and do you vote in favour of the party of our leader Adolf Hitler?

In the 1938 referendum, the election ballot posed the above leading question for Austrians to take a stand on. During this time, it was not uncommon for ballots to be designed in a way that gave a clear indication of the answer one was expected to fill in, with a central and disproportionately large circle for "yes". Unsurprisingly, the result of this election was that 99,73 % of the population in the new Germany-Austria voted in favour.

Groß' Yes 1946 is a pun hinting at the Expressionist painter George Grosz, whose surname was initially Groß which also means "large" in German. Before Hitler even came to power, Grosz fled to the United States and once there published his autobiography *A Little Yes and a Big No*. The title is a mistranslation as the opposite of big is not "a little", but instead "small". Thus, the title unintentionally became "a little yes" and this little yes survived the move to the US.

The painting by Omid Delafrouz combines the 1938 election ballot with the cover of George Grosz's autobiography.

Mechanical Flag 1946



Mechanical Flag 1946 by Omid Delafrouz (2021), oil on canvas, 150 x 150 cm



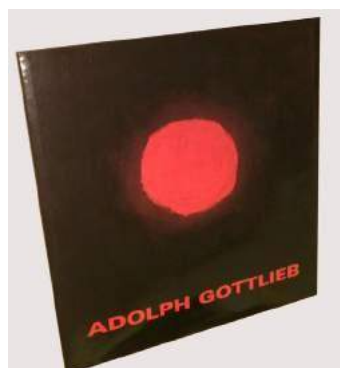
Icare by Henri Matisse (1946), gouache and collage on paper, 43.4 x 34.1 cm



Warning flag for a mechanical problem in Formula 1 racing, also from 1946



Terror I by Ann Edholm (2014), oil on canvas, 240 x 240 cm



Book cover with painting by Adolph Gottlieb



Blue on Black by Adolph Gottlieb (1970), acrylic on paper, 60.5 x 48 cm

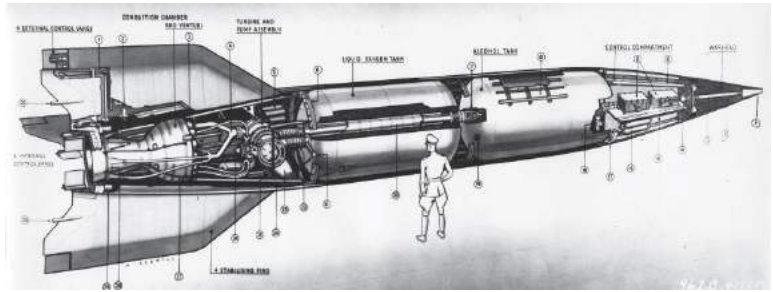
Mechanical Flag 1946

Mechanical Flag 1946 refers to the collage *Icare* by Henri Matisse, depicting the mythological figure Icarus who flew too close to the sun until his wax wings melted and he plunged into the sea and drowned. The heart of Icarus in Matisse's collage is similar to the Formula 1 flag from the same year which is used to warn a driver of a mechanical problem and to inform that they must return to their pit for repairs.

Omid Delafrouz appears to emphasize a mechanical problem in the heart of humankind during The Holocaust and is calling us back to Earth. Herein is also a reflection on the inadequacy of humans, how we reach for the sun but inevitably crash into the sea and drown, just like Icarus or the camera box on one of Hitler's long-range missiles.

In Formula 1, the mechanical flag is also called "the meatball": a fitting description of Icarus' heart in the collage by Matisse.

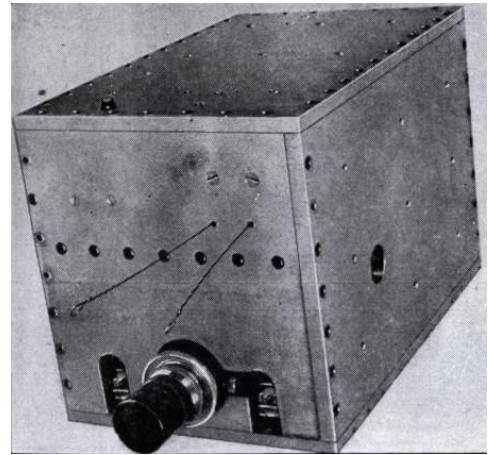
Warning Flag 1946



German V2 Vengeance 2 long-range missile



Warning Flag 1946 by Omid Delafrouz (2021-2022), oil on canvas, 112 x 150 cm



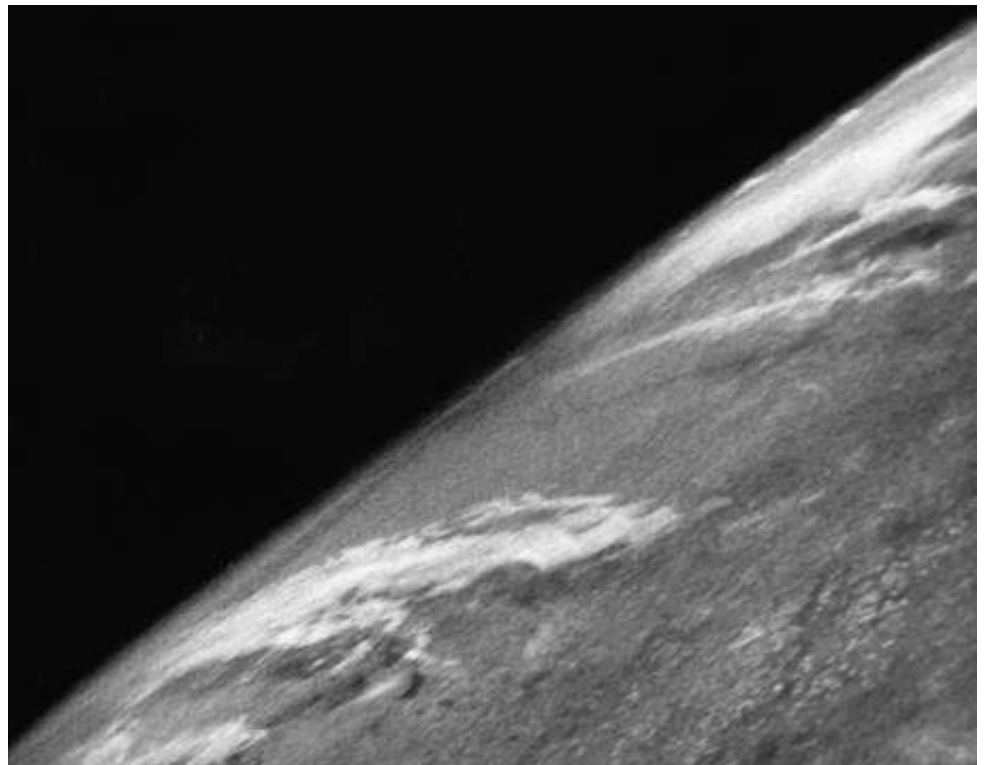
Camera encased in a steel box mounted on the V2-rocket by the Americans



Warning flag for unsportsmanlike behaviour in Formula 1 racing, also from 1946



Book cover with painting by Ellsworth Kelly



The first photograph of Earth taken from space in 1946

Warning Flag 1946

Towards the end of World War II, new top-secret weapons were developed as part of Hitler's military defense. The Germans called them "vengeance weapons" and threatened e.g. the United Kingdom that they would use them to destroy British cities.

In 1946, the United States attached a camera to one such V2 Vengeance 2 long-range missile and successfully snapped the first photograph of Earth as seen from space with the help of Nazi technology. This served as a first step in the space race, an intense political race without clearly defined rules or regulations.

At the same time as this lawlessness prevailed in the space race, specific sets of rules were established for Formula 1 racing. In his painting *Warning Flag 1946*, Omid Delafrouz draws visual parallels between this very first photograph of Earth taken from space and the warning flag for unsportsmanlike behaviour in Formula 1 racing, which is the last flag the driver sees before being dismissed from the racetrack.

Union Flag

The painting *Union Flag* portrays the remainder of the 1946 collage *Icare* by Matisse, after the mythological figure Icarus has plunged into the sea. The remaining stars resemble a broken EU flag with six stars (one for each original member state), as a representation of a dream of Europe that has been shattered.

Omid Delafrouz has taken an interest in the numerology of the number six. According to Christian mythology for instance, God created humans on the sixth day. The exhibition *Bouquet for a Day* can also be viewed as a bouquet of six paintings dedicated to the rational animal, us. Much like a bouquet handed over during a memorial for human Enlightenment.



Icare by Henri Matisse (1946),
gouache and collage on paper,
43.4 x 34.1 cm



Union Flag by Omid Delafrouz (2021), oil on
canvas, 213 x 167 cm



The European Union flag

Bouquet for a Day

by Omid Delafrouz

In one regard, I imagine the exhibition's collection of paintings as a bouquet dedicated to the rational animal¹. This bouquet is joined together by an associative bow whose knot is fixated on the epoche that poet Guillaume Apollinaire expectantly called "the time of fiery Reason"². In other words, it is a belated tasting of the *bouquet* of the 20th century³. It is an attempt to, in the tomb of the mouth, collect some of the previous century's secondary aroma⁴.

*But someone hand me,
full of dark light,
the fragrant cup*

- From Friedrich Hölderlin's poem *Andenken (Remembrance)* from 1803

1 Aristotle's definition of human beings, which formed the basis for the intellectual movement of the Enlightenment. From Ἠθικᾶ Νικομάχεια (Nicomachean Ethics) from 335- 322 B.C.

2 From the collection of poems *Calligrammes - Poèmes de la Paix et de la Guerre (1913-1916)* from 1918.

3 The word "bouquet" comes from *bouquet* in French, referring both to a cluster of flowers and the fragrant smell of wine.

4 The ancient Greek phrase "Truth in wine" has stayed with me here, most known from Erasmus' Latin re-write "In vino veritas".