

Maximiliano León is a contemporary painter whose work centres around Colonialism, its consequences, historical contexts and connections, as well as the search for one's own identity.

His often small-format works might be divided into two categories: still lifes and portraits. The still lifes frequently contain symbols of pop culture or various iconic objects related to the artist's native Yucatán region in Mexico. A series of his works depicts sketches from the artist's studio. They are filled with absolute harmony and tranquillity but at the same time are highly emotional and life-affirming.

León's portraits often represent historical figures, both Mexican and Austrian, and in particular Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico (1832-1867). Besides the name, it is the same geographical background (Austria-Mexico) that connects the artist with the Habsburg archduke, who was depicted from his castle Miramare near Trieste, to be appointed Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico by the French Emperor Napoleon III.

León's portraits can hardly be described as naturalistic reproductions, rather are they complex multi-layered works, both in terms of technique and content. Despite the distorted, almost abstract faces, historical personalities are always recognizable. They are moved out of the historical context to suddenly find themselves in the 21st century, where the consequences of the European expansion policy of the past have turned out to be one of the key challenges for the contemporary generation.

Text: Jan Gustav Fiedler – Curator, MUSEUM OF NOW

"I think painting is like life itself. You have to commit mistakes, you have to fail, and the negative feelings are important as well. ... I think that a finished painting is kind of dead, and it's important to me to leave something open, instead of overkilling it. ... I want to keep on going, I don't want to stop."

Maximiliano León was born in Yucatán in 1986, growing up in both Mexico and Vienna. He obtained his Master Degree in Painting from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna after graduating in Fine Arts from the ENPEG La Esmeralda, Mexico City. In 2020, he was part of the Academy Studio Program of the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, and held an artist residency at Biquini Wax EPS, Mexico City. In 2019, he was awarded the Prize of the Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna Art Museum) and received a stipend from the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna. León's work has been broadly exhibited in central Europe and Mexico. The artist lives and works in Mexico City, MX, and Vienna, AT.