

URS LÜTHI

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Reviews

S O – LONDON

Even major art capitals at times can be surprisingly slow in catching up with what's happening in the world. The press release for Urs Lüthi's "Art is the Better Life" states that this is the artist's first exhibition ever in London — an astonishing oversight considering his stature and pioneering role in European conceptual art. So, how to provide a sensible introduction to the multifaceted practice of someone with a career that spans over 40 years while simultaneously presenting his latest efforts?



URS LÜTHI, Just another story about leaving, 1974, 2006. Ultra-chrome print on paper, 59 x 42 cm each. Courtesy S O, London.

The show at Gallery S O, far from the pretentious and somehow impossible task of being a mini-retrospective, successfully manages to strike a balance between Lüthi's past and present, displaying a large body of work that goes from his early photography to graphics and sculpture. "Just Another Story About Leaving" (1974), a black-and-white series of photographs displayed on the ground floor, acts as a prelude. One of the first investigations of the artist on himself, it shows within nine images the hypothetical ageing of his face, his head artificially running to gray and bald. It's a disconcerting preoccupation for a man in his personal and professional prime, and one that helps explain the obsessive recurrence of his persona in the subsequently produced group of glass and bronze sculptures on the upper floor. Deliberately conventional in terms of craftsmanship, their apparent fragility and tongue-in-cheek humor convey mixed signals, with a visible enthusiasm for aesthetic and formal experimentation clashing with a fundamentally dark view on the human condition.

Lüthi has earned a reputation over the years for confounding even his most affectionate viewers, yet it's remarkable how the constant integration of biographical elements — the only link that holds together this media fest — never makes the experience of his art feel like an ego trip. Works like Self-portrait with a bind Bird (2009) or Self-portrait with empty hands (2009), although centered on his figure, are unexpectedly easy to relate to, giving a general image of life as well as reinforcing its bond with the many ways in which it can be represented.