

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

RODNEY ZELENKA

RIVERS OF BABYLON

Co-curated by Elga Wimmer and Priska Juschka.

Exhibition Dates: JUNE 27 — JULY 28, 2023

After July 28: By Appointment Thru August 8, 2023

OPENING RECEPTION: TUESDAY, JUNE 27 | 6 — 8 PM

PANEL DISCUSSION and Q&A: WEDNESDAY, JUNE 28 | 6:30 PM

Moderated by Elga Wimmer (Independent curator and writer for International publications)

PANELISTS:

Alvin Hall (financial educator, television and radio broadcaster, documentary filmmaker, author, most recently of *Driving the Green Book*, NYC)

Barbara Hoffman (pre-eminent arts, cultural heritage and cultural institution lawyer, NYC)

Lilly Wei (New York-based art critic, writer, independent curator and journalist whose primary interest is global contemporary art)

Orlando Hernández Ying (curatorial associate at the Hispanic Society Museum and Library, NYC)

Rodney Zelenka (artist based in Panama)

(Please RSVP at elgawimmer2@gmail.com or info@lichtundfire.com)

Press Release:

Lichtundfire is pleased to announce and welcomes all to the Opening Reception of RIVERS OF BABYLON, a Solo Exhibition of Works on Paper by Panamanian artist RODNEY ZELENKA, jointly curated by curator Elga Wimmer and Lichtundfire's gallery director Priska Juschka.

This exhibition, with works in various media, emphasizes and comments visually on the universal and age-old human reality of GLOBAL MIGRATION. Deeply inspired by his own family history, and by his parents, separately immigrating from Germany and Austria to Panama in the 1930's — Zelenka's primary setting for his visual language is the context of South and Central American Migration. It refers to the seemingly endless migration streams coming across Central America, with some of them arriving in the USA after a perilous journey, and often after the loss of everything they left behind in the countries they may or may not call their homelands. The reality, and often subsequent tragedy, of migration is as old as human existence. *Rivers of Babylon* points back to and reminds us of the migration and plight of the Semitic tribes of Mesopotamia between the rivers of Tigris and Euphrates. Today, still, people from every region of the world leave their birth countries to escape and find opportunities in new territories fleeing

autocracies, famine, persecution or war, while others migrate to find economical opportunity as many were seeking at height of the Babylonian empire. Both, voluntary and involuntary migration, are part of the same phenomenon and subsequently the root cause of many conflicts, now and then.

Zelenka depicts the plight of the migrants with empathy, sincerity and, at times, ironically. He mixes his visual metaphors, borrowing language and references both from contemporaries and predecessors who depicted oppression, displacement and war: Goya, Picasso, Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, Bourgeois, De Kooning, Guston and many others. We are reminded of Picasso's *Guernica* and Goya's *Sleep of Reason*, in Zelenka's own, original visual vocabulary. Cartoon style meets Surrealism. Pop is paired with Romanticism. Symbolism encounters Realism. Zelenka's mixed media works resonate with rich and tactile surfaces, with pins and gold leaf, in acrylic, oil pastel or watercolor. Prime colors, blue and red and yellow, emanate and reflect the richness of the topic and the depicted. Weapons and airplanes are shown side by side flowers, birds and spiders. Refugees cross rivers and territories. Piles and floods of human belongings turn (almost) into cosmic debris. We feel the weight of the charged narrative — historically, politically, ecologically and psychologically.

Unprepared, unequipped and without agency, migrants trade one dominion with the other — a realization by many that arrived at the shores of any new land..

Zelenka's visual symbolism is bountiful — and while his realism is often cynical, his humor is hopeful, forgiving and lyrical — a contemplation of the nature of the human condition, his works on paper reflect the richness of an amalgamate of emotions.

For additional information, images and to arrange an appointment, please contact the curators Elga Wimmer at elgawimmer2@gmail.com (www.elgawimmer.com) or Priska Juschka at 917.675.7835 or info@lichtundfire.com (www.lichtundfire.com)

Rodney Zelenka's recent and forthcoming exhibitions include Cristobal Gabarron Museum, Murcia, Spain (2020/2021); Centro Estatal de las Artes, Tecate, Baja California (2022); Tenri Cultural Institute, NYC (2022); Centro Estatal de las Artes Ensenada, Baja California (2022/2023); Lichtundfire, NYC (2023); Museo de Arte de Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico (2023); Centro Estatal de las Artes, Tijuana, Baja California (2023) Museo Metropolitano, Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico (2023), Museo del Desierto, Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico (2023), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Tamaulipas, Matamoros, Tamaulipas (2024), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo Querétaro, Querétaro, Mexico (2024) and Museo del Metro, Mexico City (2024).

GALLERY SUMMER HOURS: Tue — Fri , 12—6 pm and BY APPOINTMENT

Subway Stop: F/M or J/Z to Delancey & Essex Streets

Instagram: [@lichtundfire](https://www.instagram.com/lichtundfire) and hashtag: [#lichtundfire](https://www.instagram.com/lichtundfire)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lichtundfire>

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General Gallery Hours: Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6 pm
www.lichtundfire.com