

Puppet

2019

Oil and acrylic on canvas

200cm x 155cm

A naked figure hangs from two chains, defeated and vulnerable, against a kaleidoscopic, paint-splattered background. The pink freshness of his skin suggests a youthful spirit, which has been broken by his imprisonment. Attached to the figure's black mask are a couple dozen yellow Staedtler pencils - a favourite tool of Epp's - sharpened and ready for use. It is both a cage and a weapon, making a mockery of the faceless figure strapped behind it. His hands are smeared with paint, blackened and slumped from overuse. A ball and chain is attached to one foot, a physical restraint device historically used on prisoners, primarily in the British Empire. Is he a slave to his art or a production puppet for the art market to control? Perhaps, at times, Epp may view this painting as a self-portrait, tormented by the demands of the art world and his own expectations as an artist. A contradiction between chaos and control is present here, which echoes throughout other works, seeming to reflect the artist's own personal approach to making, where out of the disarray of his studio, highly aestheticised, accomplished paintings emerge.