

**ART from ESLEWHERE: Mexico City**  
**The MOMENTUM Collection at LAGOS**

**THOMAS ELLER**



**THE white male complex, #5 [lost] (2014), HD Video with sound, 11'25"**

Since 2011, Eller has been working on a series of various artworks under the title "THE white male complex", of which the work shown here is a part.

Shot on the beach of Catania on the Italian island of Sicily in 2014, *THE white male complex, #5 (lost)* uncannily prefigures the tragic shipwreck of 2015 which killed 700 African migrants on the same coastline, and alludes to the nearby island of Lampedusa, infamous for its migrant traffic and for the tragic shipwreck which killed 366 of the 518 African migrants packed onto an overcrowded fishing boat in 2013. With the all too familiar promiscuity of news cycles in our turbo-charged information age, these tragedies occupied the media for some days or weeks, only to move on to more pressing

concerns. But while the media may have lost interest, the underlying issues behind these tragedies and many others like them will persist as long as people anywhere on this globe nurture hopes of a better life and follow their instincts to flee hardships of all kinds. Into this gap between the global media's disinterest and the persistent need to tell the story of people in such desperate situations, enters the space for art.

A man wearing the ubiquitous attire of innumerable professions – black suit and tie, white shirt, black shoes – is incongruously floating in the ocean. Floating or drowning? This is what we inevitably come to ask ourselves as the shot lurches from above to below the water and back. This man perpetually struggling in the sea is the artist himself. In this video, Thomas Eller lives the plight of so many who wash up on such shores.

Eternally looping at the cusp of life and death, this work leaves the viewer feeling oddly complicit in one man's surreal struggle. Yet while one white man submerged in a suit comes across as surreal, the countless migrants braving a similar plight are the reality we live in. Thomas Eller, in his own visual language tackles the watery deaths of migrant workers as a sadly universal suffering, devoid of markers of place or time. This could be any sea, any beach, any tragedy. And in the timeless metaphor of treading water, this work equally signifies our persistent inability to move forward in finding a solution to the myriad issues driving people around the globe to risk their life in the pursuit of a better one.

Taken out of context and read solely through the metaphor of keeping one's head above water, *THE white male complex, #5 (lost)* becomes a timeless work, equally applicable to the struggles of the human condition. Professionally, personally, who amongst us has not at some point in their lives felt as if they were drowning. Almost, but never quite, succumbing to the pressures, expectations, and fears pulling him under, Thomas Eller translates an experience universal to the human condition into a visual language which can be read as at once hopeful, hopeless, and immutable.



**Thomas Eller (b. 1964 in Coburg, Germany. Lives and works in Mürsbach and Berlin, Germany.)**

[www.thomaseller.com](http://www.thomaseller.com)

Thomas Eller is an artist, curator, professor, and publisher. Eller started his studies in Fine Arts at the Hochschule der Künste of Berlin. After his forced dismissal, he went on to graduate in Sciences of Religion, Philosophy and Art History from the Freie Universität, Berlin (1989). Eller started his career in Berlin. From 1990 until today he has been exhibiting extensively in galleries and museums in Europe, Asia and the Americas. His international awards include: the Karl-Schmidt-Rottluff Prize (1996), the Villa-Romana Prize (Florence, 2000), the Art Omi International Art Center (New York, 2002) and the Käthe-Kollwitz-Prize from the Akademie der Künste (Berlin, 2006).

From 1995 until 2004 Eller was living in New York. After returning to Berlin, he founded the German edition of Artnet Magazine, [artnet.de](http://artnet.de), where he served as editor-in-chief (2004-2008) and was appointed executive director of the German branch of artnet AG (2005-2008). In 2008-2009, Eller served as Artistic Director of the Temporäre Kunsthalle, Berlin. He has been a member of various institutions, including the Association of International Art Critics (AICA), a Member of the Board for Creative Industries at the Chamber of Commerce in Berlin, and on the Steering Committee for Creative Industries in the Berlin Senate. Since 2013 he has been president of RanDian magazine. In 2014, heralding his move to Beijing, China (2014-2020), Eller co-curated the exhibition “The 8 of paths” with 23 Beijing-based artists in Berlin. Since moving to Beijing in 2014, Eller has taught at the Chinese National Art Academy, Beijing (2019), Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts (TAFA) (2017), Tsinghua University and Sotheby’s Institute (2016 – 2017), and was associate researcher at Tsinghua University (2019-2020). He was a correspondent for Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in Beijing (2016-2017). In 2018 he founded Gallery Weekend Beijing. And in 2018-2021, Thomas Eller was the Founding Artistic Director of “Taoxichuan China Arts & Sciences” – a major new art district to feature international artist residencies, a contemporary art museum and a biennial, in Jingdezhen, the porcelain capital of the world in the Jiangxi province. In



2022-23, Eller is co-curator of the 7<sup>th</sup> Guangzhou Triennial at the Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China (2023).

In 2020 Thomas Eller returned to Germany and started developing an old water mill in Mürsbach, Franconia, as a center for international art, fuelled by green energy. THEgallery is an exhibition and artist residency space with a focus on ecology, sustainability, and migration. [www.the-gallery.online](http://www.the-gallery.online)