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Commodious Thoughts from Outer Space

Curated by Gerwald Rockenschaub

11.10. – 14.11.2013

Opening: Thursday, October 10th 2013, 6 – 9pm

MATTHIAS DORNFELD | ALEX KATZ | BERNHARD MARTIN | MATHIEU MERCIER |
DANIEL RICHTER | THOMAS SCHEIBITZ | ANDREAS SLOMINSKI | DESPINA STOKOU

The exhibition *Commodious Thoughts from Outer Space* explores the idea of painting extending across different dimensions – that it can be broken down into its fundamental elements or amplified into three dimensions. Here panel painting serves as the principle medium for examining these concepts, and ranges from classical portraits by Alex Katz to extensive sculptural ensembles by Mathieu Mercier. The exhibition at the Krobath Gallery swings between the extremes of figuration and disfiguration. Katz's realistic representations are juxtaposed against works by Bernhard Martin, while Thomas Scheibitz and Despina Stokou address the abstraction of space, and present it as a two-dimensional collage that hints at its own constructed nature.

The exhibition's title refers to its holistic and universal interpretation of theories on the curvature of space, where curved two-dimensional planes are transferred into other dimensions. As one-dimensional spaces or – as they occur in paintings – lines do not have an intrinsic curvature, they are rendered in multi-dimensional spaces where they take on an extrinsic curvature. How this curvature manifests itself is determined by the viewers' position in relation to the art works, which take on concrete form in the three-dimensional context of the exhibition. This exhibition therefore offers an insight into current issues in painting, which, as an original medium of art and art history, now links to present-day media discourses and examines them in a specific context.

Walter Seidl

(english translation: Mandana Taban)

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Alex Katz

Alex Katz, born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1927, is indisputably one of the fathers of pop art. He lives and works between New York and Lincolnville (Maine). In his figurative painting, Alex Katz was always on the borderline between abstraction and realism. He was doing figurative painting when the whole of American art had turned decisively away from representation. At that time, Katz countered the painters such as Jackson Pollock, who obstinately insisted on an impulsive, individual signature or the presentation of hardly perceptible differences, with his cool treatment of a fully visible, verifiable world. Since the 1980s he has been the outstanding protagonist of Cool Painting, and one of the most influential painters in the world. He became a kind of cult figure for a whole generation of painters now in their thirties and forties. Long before the protagonists of pop art, such as Andy Warhol, Katz adopted the principle of serialism, and influenced an entire generation with it. Katz's works, however, always bear a connection with the history of American painting, to Georgia O'Keeffe, Fairfield Porter, Ralston Crawford and Edward Hopper.

Andreas Slominski

The sculptures of Andreas Slominski (b 1959 in Meppen, Germany) were first noticed in the early eighties. While his works dating from that time were the size of fairly small sculptures, in recent years they have grown into often voluminous installations. From the start, Slominski sought direct dialogue with the viewer. His so-called "traps" are absurd-looking baits, somewhere between sculpture and functional object. Similarly to Duchamp, he integrates everyday objects into the context of art in order to visualise the process of artistic perception. His work includes bicycles, windmills, found objects and materials taken from everyday life, showing components of his ironic universe along with a tribute to dadaist ideas.

Bernhard Martin

In the early 1940s, Francis Picabia was the first artist to copy trivial magazine pictures into his works on a large scale. He became the father-figure for a generation of artists socialised in the '80s, who countered the flood of media images by intensive sampling and delight in unconventional combinations. In this context, the novel radicality of Bernhard Martin (b 1966 in Hanover) is surprising: the most diverse imaginable pictorial worlds are combined in his works and, in the Surrealist tradition, entangled in interactions. The hybridity of the people, landscapes and objects he portrays is emphasised by their stylistic inhomogeneity: here photo-realistic segments are juxtaposed with gestural abstractions and fine-chiselling reminiscent of the old masters. Bernhard Martin is a chronicler of everyday life; his well-considered, never spontaneous recourse to the sometimes most infantile objects is typical. He lives and works in London.

„Commodious Thoughts from Outer Space“ Krobath

Daniel Richter

Daniel Richter was born in 1962 in Eutin (Germany). Today, he lives and works in Berlin. The artist has shaped painting in Germany since the 1990s as few others have done. In his large-scale oil paintings, Richter dovetails set pieces of art history, mass media and pop culture into idiosyncratic, narrative pictorial worlds. Daniel Richter studied 1992-1996 with Werner Büttner – one of the protagonists, along with Martin Kippenberger, of the revival of expressive trends in painting during the 1980s – at the Hamburg Academy of Fine Arts, and worked as assistant to Albert Oehlen. Initially, he did abstract paintings, with a cosmos of forms intensely colourful to the point of being psychedelic – somewhere between graffiti and intricate ornamentation. Since 2002 he has painted large-scale scenes filled with figures, often inspired by reproductions from newspapers or history books. These show conflict and menace in excessive aggression and vitality. The symbolist painter James Ensor and the pioneer of expressionism, Edvard Munch, might be seen here as Richter's artistic forebears. The representation of artificial light, flashlight, thermal image or X-ray picture evokes an atmosphere of artificiality and nervousity. The theme of total surveillance seems to be an important motif in Richter's oeuvre – the association with infra-red and thermal imaging cameras is unavoidable, revealing a paranoid view. Richter's subjects suggest allusion to current politics, but on closer inspection, we see that this is not so.

Despina Stokou

Born in Athens, Greece, living and working in Berlin, Germany. In her works Despina analyses the structures that enable (and at the same time distort) the production and dissemination of art: galleries, money, language, gender roles and the notion of success. The most prominent elements of her paintings are textual rather than pictorial. She cuts out letters from coloured origami paper and places them onto the canvas. The letters conquer the canvas in a way that is reminiscent of the powerful graffiti which once adorned New York's walls, buses and underground trains. Back then, in the mid 1970s, Jean Baudrillard referred to this as the "revolution of signs". Her method of scraping the colour, putting together newspaper and magazine snippets to create collages and selectively using spray colours results in a riotous ensemble. Stokou finds the material for her textual paintings in her immediate surroundings. She does not aim to produce a strict narrative or to uncover some kind of hidden correlation. Instead, she focuses on private mythologies, linguistic games and misunderstandings: "A lot of the words I used are intended to open up paths to other spaces."

Matthias Dornfeld

Born 1960 in Esslingen, Germany, lives and works in Berlin. Matthias Dornfeld dissolves forms in his paintings and with this mechanism produces new forms. But this dissolution, unlike the abstractions of post-war modernism, is not first and foremost an expression of doubt or a critical rejection of reality. There is indeed room for doubt in Matthias Dornfeld's pictures, but there is first of all a great love of life and an almost naive meta-modern sensibility inherent in his paintings. His paintings are at once vigorous and direct, tender and delicate. The dark and the uncanny encounter beauty, lightness and sensuality. Abstraction and empathy: lines and colours become ever new figures, faces, bunches of flowers, both prototypical and individual. They are timeless, but with a presence that is absolutely contemporary.

Thomas Scheibitz

Thomas Scheibitz was born in Radeberg, Germany in 1968. He started painting and producing sculpture in 1990 and quickly gained international recognition. Through the use of both mediums, he explores the boundary between figuration and abstraction, playing with the traditional genres of landscape, still life and portraiture. According to Roberta Smith (NY times), "his sculptures resemble architectural models or fragments of logos; his paintings are vaguely figurative. Both seem derived from some outside source, and display a flexible faith in form's infinite allusiveness and consequent ability to inspire free-form reverie." Scheibitz says: "My work is influenced by the poles of contemporaneity and timelessness, by sense and nonsense."