

Albrecht Schnider

curated by Beat Wismer

Vernissage: Friday, September 6, 2019, 6 – 8 pm
Finissage: Saturday, October 26, 2019, 11.30 am, film screening
«Albrecht Schnider was bleibt», film portrait by Rita Ziegler,
Arthouse Piccadilly Zürich
Duration: September 7 – October 26, 2019
Opening hours: Tues–Fri 11 am – 6.30 pm, Sat 11 am – 4 pm

We are pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Swiss artist Albrecht Schnider. It's the first exhibition after his return from Berlin.

The selection of works focuses on new pictures, some of them created with this exhibition in mind. A few carefully chosen early works provide a fascinating insight into the ongoing development as well as the intrinsic constancy of his diverse output over nigh on four decades. The exhibition has been curated by Beat Wismer in close collaboration with the artist.

Albrecht Schnider's visual art has evolved between the two divergent poles of drawing and painting. Or rather, it has charted a course from free and spontaneous drawing, as a starting point, towards the execution of painted of images with a truly iconic radiance. The drawings and paintings are polar opposites. The drawings are created with the greatest possible freedom and autonomy, whereby all compositional or design intent is secondary and each line is created with the greatest possible immediacy, flowing directly from the hand, in the spirit of *écriture automatique*. Such an approach to drawing does not involve the abstraction of some external object, but is more a case of finding form through thought-free execution. Drawing thus becomes a daily exercise involving countless sheets of paper, most of which end up being destroyed and only a few retained, while fewer still are translated into paintings and images. The drawing is the most intimate germination of Albrecht Schnider's visual output. For a long time, he was very reticent about showing his drawings in public. This exhibition presents, for the very first time, a group of drawings from 1985, opening our eyes to the crucial role that drawing – painting's little sister – has always played, right from the beginning, in Schnider's visual approach.

In contrast to his drawings, all traces of individual handwriting have been rigorously eliminated from his paintings over the past twenty years. From the mid-90s onwards, he began producing large-format pictures that transposed freely sketched drawings into an extremely precise form of painting, like a gesture frozen in time. This was soon followed by the transition from oil painting to the relative anonymity of acrylics. Alongside the shift towards greater anonymity and the elimination of all visible handwriting – it being irrelevant whether the image, or the translation of drawing into painting, was executed by the artist himself and by his own hand – there was also an ongoing process of radical reduction. This reductive process reached its zenith around 2005 in the portraits of heads with an empty white facial area and the white paintings in empty frames.

This approach freed up all manner of possibilities in the paintings that followed, in which a constellation of forms executed with astonishing precision conjured a sense of freedom that defied the narrow and stringent adherence to the preliminary drawings. The paintings exude a lightness grounded not only in an immense knowledge of painting, but also in a thoroughly founded knowledge of its history. The paintings by Albrecht Schnider preserve much of the painterly tradition: his visual interest is based on art history and classical modernism, reaching all the way to contemporary art, as well as in the decorative arts and calligraphy. The figures in his works can appear in almost sketch-like condensed form, or indeed in complex fragmentations; they may appear on the raw ground of the canvas or play through the figure-ground issue in sophisticated

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and authoritative ways. In these works with their distinctive constellations of form and plane and their idiosyncratic colours, Albrecht Schnider took what was, in many respects, an extraordinary and independent stance with regard to contemporary painting – a circumlocution which, from his very first exhibitions as a decidedly figurative painter – was entirely fitting and justified at every step of the way in terms of his overall oeuvre.

In addition to the daily exercise of drawing, his work contains another important aspect: for many years, and to this day, he has sporadically created oil paintings in the studio depicting carefully constructed landscape images. All are painted in the same small landscape format featuring the same or very similar type of stylised Alpine foothill scenes, though the colours and overall atmosphere may change. Not only do these small-format oil paintings pose questions as to abstraction and figuration, ornament and decoration; they also raise questions on another level regarding rational construction and nostalgic yearning – themes that run throughout Albrecht Schnider's work, and are worthy of consideration within the context of his oeuvre as a whole.

Albrecht Schnider (*1958 in Sörenberg/Entlebuch, lives in Hilterfingen/Thunersee) graduated from School of Art & Design and University of Berne in 1987. Between 1982 and 1992 he spent longer periods in Follonica near Grosseto as well as in Rome and Florence. He has received numerous grants and awards, including the Swiss award for young artists (Eidgenössisches Kunststipendium) in 1989, 1990 and 1992 and the Manor Kunstpreis of Lucerne in 1994. Since 2005, he is been teaching painting at the Hochschule der Künste in Bern. Since 1986 his works have been shown at many solo and group exhibitions, 2014 and 2017 at Helmhaus Zurich, 2016 at Kunsthalle Bern and Kunstmuseum Luzern, 2015 at Galleria d'Arte Moderna Milano and Weserburg Museum für Moderne Kunst in Bremen. Numerous works can be found in private and public Swiss and international collections.

(Text: Beat Wismer)

The opening will be on Friday, September 6, 2019 from 6 – 8 pm. Albrecht Schnider will be present.

The finissage will take place on Saturday, October 26, 2019 at 11.30 am with the film screening of the portrait «Albrecht Schnider was bleibt» by Rita Ziegler at the cinema Arthouse Piccadilly in Zurich.

We are happy to provide visual materials on request (office@mai36.com).

We look forward to seeing you at the gallery and thank you for your interest.

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Victor Gisler

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