

Press release
March 2020

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder

March 7 to April 19, 2020
39 Great Jones Street, New York, NY 10012
Opening on Friday, March 6, 6 to 8 pm

Eva Presenhuber is pleased to announce its eighth solo exhibition with the Swiss artist Jean-Frédéric Schnyder.

Schnyder began producing experimental objects in the late 1960s within the context of pop art and has since gone on to create a broad oeuvre encompassing photographs, sculptures, paintings, objects, and installations. Conceptually and radically open in his artistic process, each series of works he creates leads to a new experimental arrangement. Accordingly, Schnyder does not simply adhere to an overarching concept, but rather meticulously focuses upon his subject, thereby coming up with ever-new concepts. The result of this unique openness is an oeuvre full of discontinuity; some of his approaches are so different from each other that they seem to be all but mutually exclusive.

In this exhibition, Schnyder gives us an overview of his paintings from the 1970s up until 2000, and shows the room-installation *Hüter der Schwelle (Guardians of the threshold)* from 2014. In the 42 predominantly small-format pictures, which the artist has arranged especially for this presentation, one can witness surprising continuities and breaks in Schnyder's work, which offer a glimpse into his thinking process.

The only large-format canvas on view, *Stilleben (Still Life)* from 1970, is one of Schnyder's first paintings. It was initially shown in 1971 at La Biennale Paris together with the pictures *Akt (Act)* and *Landschaft (Landscape)*. This exhibition was a sensation in more than one way. Just two years earlier, Schnyder had displayed conceptual objects in the exhibition *When Attitude Becomes Form* at Kunsthalle Bern. Therefore, paintings constituted a new medium for the artist, and displaying paintings in Paris meant going against the grain, as the medium was considered passé in the early 1970s. The Paris show was indeed not attuned to painting, so much so that Schnyder displaying paintings was interpreted as a unique conceptual statement, even though the works were not created under the guise of a concept, but rather reflected the artist's genuine interest in a medium he was beginning to discover for himself. Many important aspects of later works can be found in *Stilleben (Still Life)*.

Stilleben, Akt, Landschaft (Still Life, Act, Landscape) represent the three most common motifs in art history. This interest in existing and common practices is typical of the artist. It is almost impossible to discern a stylistic development within Schnyder's oeuvre; style never being an aspect of the painter's individual development, but rather a means the artist draws upon for each painting or series. For this reason, his works are stylistically highly heterogeneous.

From 1982 to 1983, Schnyder created his first series of *plein air* paintings: the *Berner Veduten (Vedute of Bern)*, encompassing 128 paintings. At the time, the artist had no studio, which is why he adopted the tradition of *plein air* painting and began to work outdoors in Bern and surrounding areas. Drawing upon veduta motifs typical of the works of painters like Ferdinand Hodler, he again turned to the commonplace. However, he did not act as a copyist, being primarily interested in the process of painting itself. The landscapes are precise; he did not exclude a single pylon or vapor trail, which might have been removed from a romantic landscape. Inversely, Schnyder not only discovered new details in the landscapes but also in the paintings he referred to. Thus, he over accentuated artistic effects such as the corona of a sunrise in a work by Hodler, thereby reflecting the beholder's own vision of art history.

In his subsequent *plein air* studies, Schnyder intensified and expanded this focus on art history and the Swiss landscapes depicted. His *Bänkli-Bilder (Pictures from Benches)*—five of which are on display (*So liebt Gott die Welt, Bei Kerzers, Stürmische Winde aus Nordwest, Das Prättigau bei Grüşch, Milten bei Schleinheim*—*Thus God Loves the World, At Kerzer's, Stormy Winds from the North-West, The Prättigau near Grüşch, Milten near Scheinheim*)—were all painted from the vantage points of different public benches. In this group lies an irresistible logic typical to Schnyder's approach:

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on the one hand, the painter does not have to choose a specific section of the landscape; on the other, these are exactly the perspectives that hikers and those walking encounter daily. Moreover, a large selection of benches allows for an encyclopedic capturing of his subject. It is part and parcel of Schnyder's exact practice and his photographic vision that the view, which might have been unspoiled before the bench was installed, is not untouched by the time the painting was produced.

The precision and totality with which Schnyder captures his motifs lead to an ambiguity, which does not stem from an ironic attitude, but an exact perception of reality. His perspective brings something repressed to the fore like pylons or motorways, which do not fit into the archetype of romanticized Swiss landscapes but have become an accepted part of these landscapes.

In his studio works, which include figurative and abstract pieces, Schnyder carves out this difference between the pictorial and the symbolic order. This is most obvious in the abstract *Studie XVIII (Study XVIII)* in which a canvas primed in green bears an also green relief spelling the letters ROT, German for red. ROT is not red.

In this extraordinary way, Schnyder projects theoretical discussions onto the canvas itself. His interest in practical solutions lets him create certain archetypes, such as a torso featuring color as the body of painting, or one of the golden rules of painting—"Fett auf Mager (fat over lean)"—painted over a canvas he did not paint himself but bought. Schnyder's solution of how to paint another classic motif, flowers, is to draw upon a static system of pixels reminding one of early digital aesthetics as well as of color field paintings of the beginning of the 20th century. These floral paintings seem so lucid that they amount to a color theory one can perceive with one's senses.

The paintings are accompanied by the 22-part lamp installation *Hüter der Schwelle (Guardians of the threshold)*, which consists of banana cartons bearing holes resembling faces, but also reminiscent of typical box handles. Thus, an everyday object becomes a form. Schnyder and his family moved around Switzerland often and, in the course of these relocations, accumulated many boxes. In 2012, Schnyder decided to use the boxes as material for his sculptures and, in doing so, repurposed every part of this moving good from the cardboard to small metal brackets. The notion of reusing materials and giving them new life can also be seen in certain of Schnyder's abstract paintings, where he saves leftover pigment from other works and then applies them with a scraper in a burst of riotous color.

The installation and the 42 paintings on display are so diverse that their assembly does not seem to make sense at first sight. However, the logic exists precisely in the fact that single works and series are the results of a rigidly methodical process, while the whole goes far beyond these systems. In the series themselves, insanity has found its system while Schnyder's work defies any kind of systemization.

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder was born in 1945 in Basel, CH. He lives and works in Zug, CH. His first solo exhibition organized by Eva Presenhuber at Galerie Walcheturm in Zurich took place in 1993, followed by another in 1996. A solo exhibition at Galerie Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber took place in 1999. At Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, Schnyder has had solo exhibitions in 2004, 2010, and 2019. In 2018, Eva Presenhuber, New York showed the body of works *Am Thunersee* in a solo exhibition. Schnyder contributed to the La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT (2013); La Biennale Paris, Paris, FR (1985 and 1971); Documenta 5, Kassel, DE (1972); and Documenta 7, Kassel, DE (1982). Recent solo exhibitions have taken place in international institutions including Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH (2014); Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern, CH (2013); Ca' Corner della Regina Venice, Venice, IT (2013); Le Consortium, Dijon, FR (2012); and The Swiss Institute / Contemporary Art, New York, US (2011). Group exhibitions in major museums include *Zeitgeist*, MAMCO – Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva, CH (2017); *Das Fotobuch und seine Autoren*, Swiss National Library, Bern, CH (2015); *Drawings from the Ringier Collection Chapter I*, Villa Flora Winterthur – Sammlung Hahnloser, Winterthur, CH (2015); and *Ferdinand Hodler, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder*, Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH (2014).

Tillmann Severin

For further information, please contact Jill McLennon (j.mclennon@presenhuber.com) at the gallery.

For press images and information, please contact Naomi Chassé (n.chasse@presenhuber.com) at the gallery.

39 GREAT JONES STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10012
TEL: +1 212 931 0711
WWW.PRESENHUBER.COM