

MAI 36 GALERIE

Albrecht Schnider

at the garden's border

Vernissage: Friday, 01 September 2023, 6pm
Exhibition duration: 01 September - 14 October 2023
Opening hours: Tue-Fri 11 - 6:30pm, Sat 11 - 5pm

"at the garden's border" is Albrecht Schnider's second solo exhibition at Mai 36 Galerie.

Carefully chosen and presented alongside the artist's latest works are significant transitional and/or key works in an attempt to highlight the illuminating nature of his oeuvre, spanning three decades. Some of the works on display are so different in their appearance that someone unfamiliar with Schnider's work may doubt that they are in fact from the same artist. In the exhibition space, they are positioned in a subtle yet insightful context to one another where some of the earlier works may be considered or recognized as predecessors of later non-representational or abstract paintings. The predominant motifs of the exhibition are landscape, flora and mankind.

In 1996, Schnider created his (for now) last explicit figurative painting: Five young men walk one after the other, or rather, the same ginormous young man walks five times across the picture. Albrecht Schnider caught in the middle of a movement. Like on a badly developed photograph the pale figures seem to blend into the light foundation. The painting could be interpreted as an image stored in memory. Today there are even more good arguments to support such a reading, especially when we look at the large scale 'empty' frame pictures and recapitulate the creative process of the artist before these huge white 'mirrors'.

Albrecht Schnider's creative process typically begins with the act of free drawing, allowing him to find forms that can later be transmitted to painting. By the end of the 1990s, Schnider started to turn away from representationalism: he created works for which he transformed spontaneous drawings into extremely precise painting, executed with meticulous care. In this process, all traces of craftsmanship are erased in order to reach an object-like, sometimes even iconic effect. Through reduction and stylisation Schnider began to formalise his motifs, creating distanced depictions: figures that were once explicitly identifiable slowly vanished, became types; deserted landscapes a blur of forms – gradually, man and nature begin to align ornamentally. Moving towards greater anonymisation and the eradication of everything handwritten, a process towards the greatest possible reduction took place. This reductive process culminated in the pictures of heads with white empty faces and his white pictures surrounded by empty frame shapes. Confronted with the precarious balance between the portrayed and the mode of representation, we find ourselves on the tipping point of figuration and abstraction, calligraphy and rational construction, sense and emptiness of meaning.

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Only in his landscape paintings, which he started in the late 1980s, Schnider still adheres to a clear pictorial type. They can be viewed as a constant and integral part of his diverse oeuvre. Following countless studies and drawings, a pictorial body emerges, constructed out of geometrically placed lines and colour combinations. But what is painted is not actually a landscape, rather a picture that reminds us of a landscape. Free of people and details of nature, it conveys a cool detachment, which is created by the renunciation of the handwritten gesture. The viewers don't find a way to enter, rather, they hover over this unreal, almost supernatural landscape, longing for orientation.

The gestural moment of the hand drawing leads to painterly solutions in Schnider's most recent gouache works. While many of Schnider's recent pieces, especially his synthetic acrylic paintings, are perfectly constructed and thoroughly planned, his small-format works attempt to return to a more direct, spontaneous creative process, a freer form of painting that has much in common with Schnider's way of drawing. In a way, a return to the beginnings of his work.

Albrecht Schnider (*1958 in Lucerne, Switzerland) graduated from the Hochschule für Gestaltung and the University of Bern in 1987. From 2005-2021 Schnider held a professorship at the Bern University of the Arts. Important institutional solo exhibitions include Kunstmuseum Thun (2021), Helmhaus, Zurich (2014), Haus am Waldsee, Berlin (2011), Kunstmuseum Solothurn (2011), Aargauer Kunsthau (2006), daad Galerie, Berlin (1999), Kunstmuseum Luzern (1994). His works are represented numerous private and public collections, including the Kunsthau Zürich, the Kunstmuseum Bern, the Kunstmuseum Luzern, the Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, the Kupferstichkabinett Berlin & Basel and the Schering Foundation, Berlin. Albrecht Schnider lives and works in Hilterfingen, near Thun.