

CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

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„FRONT ROW“

**Artist books, Catalogues, CDs, DVDs, Vinyl, Paraphernalia
Woodcuts, Paintings, Photos, Graphics and Sculptures**

The gallery **Contemporary Fine Arts** has been in existence now for twenty years and can look back over more than 150 exhibitions. For almost half of this time one worked without the internet and electronic media that is hard to believe in the digital era. This makes it all the more fascinating to dip into the analogue past and the first exhibition catalogues, posters, invitation cards etc. out of the CFA archive. These materials were meant to have a continued existence and are thereby the opposite of the transitory mode of the digital posts in today's multimedia-based world. Where the aim is speed and to be the first to announce news, where as the former printed materials were thought out down to the finest detail and should above all be final, definite and irreversible. The fun that the gallery and the artists had during the production is sustained in the object: Holding a catalogue in ones hands, being able to take a small piece of the exhibition home and to enjoy it over and over again over the years.

The title "FRONT ROW" alludes to the gallery's pioneering role as one of the first institutions to issue publications on individual exhibitions. These were designed in close collaboration with the artists. Be it Damien Hirst's "Making Beautiful Drawings" from 1994, Peter Doig's "Blotter" from 1995, Daniel Richter's "17 Jahre Nasenbluten" from the year 1997, Jonathan Meese's comprehensive catalogue "Mama Johnny" from the Deichtorhallen Hamburg or the large monographic publication on Dash Snow, both from 2007, as well as Tal R's "Adieu Interessant" from 2008. Also rarities, such as Raymond Pettibon's fanzines from the eighties, Sigmar Polke's catalogue "Gemeinschaftswerk Aufschwung Ost" from 1993 and original sketchbooks by Norbert Schwontkowski will be on view.

The exhibition presents artist books, exhibition catalogues, posters, DVDs, vinyl, and other paraphernalia. These materials were collected over the last twenty years and are now presented in the temporary shop "Front Row". The shop will be open from February 22 until April 26, 2014 and will be located on the ground floor of the gallery CFA. In addition woodcuts, paintings, photos, graphic and sculptures will be on view. The exhibition is accompanied by a lecture programme.

der Freitag Extra



“Toilets are something like the downside of our existence, the other side of the coin. Hidden and dirty they serve only to clean everything up that we don’t want to have around us. ... They are familiar to us – no matter if we view toilets primarily as a receptive jar, as refuge or as a well-formed object.”

Sarah Lucas



FRONT ROW

FRONT ROW

A Pop-Up Store by Contemporary Fine Arts



Tal R „13 West Indies“, 2014

FRONT ROW

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FRONT ROW

22 February – 26 April 2014

Contemporary Fine Arts

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Berlin-Mitte

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Tuesday – Saturday, 1 am – 6 pm



Jonathan Meese „Napoleon“, 2006

Sarah Lucas



Sarah Lucas „Human Toilet II“, 1996

Cover image:
Sarah Lucas „Is Suicide Genetic?“, 1996

The British artist Sarah Lucas (born 1962) became known for her use and re-interpretation of everyday objects. After

studying at Goldsmiths College in London, one of her main criteria was that her material was cheap to obtain and available in abundance. Furthermore it should not only address herself but also everyone else. Therefore she started to use clippings from the tabloids, in particular reports with sexually provocative images and striking titles. The first works from this series were called for example "Penis Nailed to a Board" or "Fat, Forty and Fabulous" and show stark facts in a large scale.

She also included everyday objects into her works such as tables or chairs. One of the most famous and today iconic works from the early nineties is entitled "Two Fried Eggs and a Kebab". Lucas arranged two fried eggs and a kebab on a wooden table. The placement of the objects reminds one of a female body. A photo of a close-up of the composition positioned next to it let presume the same.

On another occasion she inserted two melons in a mattress, laid a bucket underneath and placed a cucumber protruding out from behind two oranges. Of course one immediately thinks of a bed with a woman and a man lying on it. With a boorish matter of course Lucas arranges vegetables, fast food or furniture into

gender slapsticks – her art shocks, irritates and makes you laugh.

Further important materials for Lucas were cigarettes and tights, which she stuffed with cotton and draped on chairs in a lascivious pose. Cigarettes she always had available and built compact sculptures such as coffins, vacuum cleaners or penises out of them. She also ordered them lineally on paper sheets in order to form portraits with them.

A special focus lay in the self-portrait that she used in her art from the beginning on. In her photos she presented herself in strong masculine strong poses und integrated these into her collages, painted over them or papered entire walls with them. Her shoes, usually heavy ones, were immortalised in concrete and arranged as sculptures. She also cast her body parts in concrete or replicated them in wax, presented her extended middle finger or her mouth with a cigarette between the teeth. Here it is also the question of gender or identity. According to Lucas "all the alleged identities are ... merely – extraordinary fragile – constructs. They could be completely different just as well. ... Why should for instance women not be aggressive – or sit in a bus with their legs apart and occupy two seats? Or

why should men not wear dresses? Why shouldn't it be normal that both genders are bisexual?"

Back to the constantly recurring motive in Lucas' work: toilets. She photographed them smeared with dirt, sat on them for self-portraits half naked, arranged them as ready-made like sculptures (immediately bringing to mind Duchamp), made casts out of transparent synthetics and replicated them with cigarettes. Under the title "Is Suicide Genetic?" she dedicated nearly a complete exhibition to the toilet, which Contemporary Fine Arts showed in 1996 for the inauguration of their new space in Berlin Mitte and thereby bestowed one of the protagonists of the "Young British Artists" a fulminant appearance in Germany. The title page of the supplement is also a work from this series. With its drastic diction and abhorrent aesthetics it unsettles then and now similarly. "How would I explain my art to others? Well, it's about life, about all the things that move us." About sex, fear and death.

Works by Sarah Lucas will be on view in the exhibition **FRONT ROW** at Contemporary Fine Arts from February 22 until April 26, 2014.

Thomas Houseago

Thomas Houseago – born in 1972 in Leeds in England – studied at Saint Martins College of the Arts in London and in De Ateliers in Amsterdam with Stanley Brouwn, Georg Herold, and Thomas Schütte. After initial performance experiments, he decided to become a sculptor. As someone who grew up in the surroundings of labor revolt and economic crisis, he didn't have much to do with clinical Minimalism and Post-Duchampists. With his artworks and the "clay-chunks" he had been struggling with for months, he wasn't very successful in the beginning. "In everyone's eyes, I was this reactionary freak who believed in a dead medium and who dared to form bodies, creatures and faces." "As a sculptor," he says, "he had given everything and sold nothing – except someone had pity on me. I was already glad when I was able to persuade somebody to accept a work of mine as a present." Houseago indeed had early institutional exhibitions, such as at the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam in 1996 or at the SMAK Gent in 2003, the break-through, however, would follow a couple of years later in Los Angeles where he emigrated to in 2003. Prior to his move, due to a lack of money and space, he destroyed a large proportion of his artworks and threw them away.

Houseago's works – becoming more and more



known in the US and Europe from 2006 on and which were shown in 2009 in his first solo show in Germany with Contemporary Fine Arts – were equally inspired by artists such as Picasso, Henry Moore, and Giacometti as well as by Marvel comics, Star Wars and other Hollywood movies, archaic cultures and Roman sculptures. White plaster, raw wood, iron, and charcoal are the characteristic materials Houseago uses in crude and rudimentary form for most of his sculptures looking like a mixture of Darth Vader and idols of an unknown culture. "I wanted to get away from the Ready-Made and found it important to return to simple ways in order to demonstrate a fundamental drama," says Houseago. In an astonishingly graphical technique, he drafts individual elements with charcoal on width of paper lying on the floor, pours the plaster directly on them, forms the individual body parts he moves off from the floor when they are dry and arranges them as sculptures. Along with the voluminous, elaborated forms, the flat plaster casts emerge on which the artist apparently has drawn with a pencil. This effect comes from the monotypic printing process during which the charcoal on the floor is printed into the wet plaster.

Changing between tossed, comic-like drafts and classical statues, the figures literally reveal the physical exertion and the energetic gesture of their creator. Their effect switches between corporeal, heroic monumentality and scenery-like, fragile brittleness. Despite the reduction of material, colour and volume, Houseago's sculptures thus indicate an enormous presence and corporeity serving as an unadorned model instead of displaying pleasing visible sides.

The sculpture "Devil I", 2010 from Thomas Houseago will be presented at Contemporary Fine Arts as part of the exhibition **FRONT ROW**.

Raymond Pettibon

„...more doubts than certainties“

Things are as bad between image and text, “free art” and “scholarly prose” as the cliché of the erotic muse and the professor with the magnifying glass suggests. If not worse because it is well known that reality



is often more inventive than the imagination. Therefore, it seems advisable to avoid this danger area. However, the cumulation of gaffes and “accidents” indicates a productive source, and this is probably why Raymond Pettibon spends time there, because whatever may have been said about his art so far: he does not just mingle drawing and language, or animate icons and slogans with the panache of his writing. Rather, he is a specialist for nuances, a master of the puzzling, a virtuoso of the remark that does not quite fit.

His pictures come about where he can motivate figures and signs that populate official and private thinking to take another ride, and he takes them in every facet of their intentions. Whether reactionary or conservative, committed or neo-puritan, correct or feminist, mercantile or intimate, religious or academic, active or intellectual, even if they are just imagined or speak quite involuntarily. In the first years of his activity publishing things, he wanted to equip the audience – and that was around 1980 largely the *no-illusions generation* of punk rock – with an inking that the radicalness in his “views” was not quite as smug as theirs. By now, however, his products cross the field of art, and



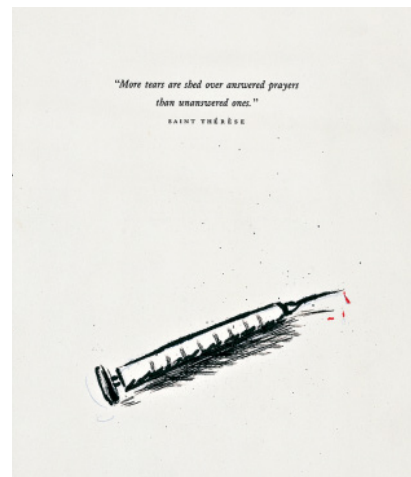
there the skin is a little thicker, filled with sensibility and other valuables. In return, he abandoned the protection of ironic distance.

Raymond Pettibon was born in 1957 in Hermosa Beach, Los Angeles, not far from one of the beautiful beaches where the Pacific Ocean throws its flotsam back to the Land of Opportunities. And still, everyday, the sun shines on the enjoyment of leisure time, be that as pleasure in the waves of the ocean, of fashion, music, or film. Raymond Pettibon has moved in all these media. He was a surfer who drew a line in the morning on the latest “new wave” that at its peak went down completely unmoved. During the day, he seemed to guarantee the *art work* of a music label, and in the evening, he was the man with the camera who strode the ideals of the underground; there, he portrayed the armed struggle of the weathermen in underpants or the daughter of a powerful media baron, converted from a kidnapping victim to a soldier of the *Symbionese Liberation Army*. That he recently moved to Manhattan and now looks over the canyons of the city from the 57th floor might make sense in theory because it would mean that he arrived at the centre of the market that has given his pictures a remarkable popularity in recent years. The music world denied that to him while at the same time using all his contributions without taking a closer look or doing any research. The art world loves above all his surfers, in blue on paper; but he stays away from the rituals of the art market. On the East Coast, he is now with his own four walls part of a picture that keeps Los Angeles ready only as an apparition that rotates at some point along the highway. Much more important for Pettibon’s poetics is that with that high-rise on the Hudson, he has taken up post in a city where the think tanks of American politics train their staff and generate their products, slogans, and thought patterns that are, after a short testing phase, released into the world, where soon enough, there are parroted as small private opinions wherever there is an argument about a controversial topic, for example the highly modern military campaigns in areas rich in crude oil, or sexual permissiveness. These conflict zones elude control and, but for the readjusting propaganda catchphrases, could really unbalance the dominating conditions.

Raymond Pettibon’s drawings take their point of departure in the blatant confidence of a propaganda product. On the outside, they are supposed to be so simple and seductive, convincing and plausible, that they settle in people’s minds as their own ideas. He also values this mixture of stereotype and confusion, placing catchy

phrases next to well-known motifs. He pulls his figures in black ink from the stream of images and gives them phrases that read as a fluid thought of their problems, a language that flows easily in the slope of a melody, familiar and possibly actually borrowed from a piece of much-read literature. And usually right next to this, the next words land on the paper, in another voice, with new thoughts and notions, and slowly a tension arises in this entire ensemble of splotches, contrasts, and reflected lights. Constellations that just a moment ago were framed by a stable scene now drift apart. The lines of the writing are interrupted, and loose brushstrokes – in the players like the disorder of a drunken speech – uncouple the rest. In the end, the beginning has also lost its unambiguousness, and every line, be it in the course of a gesture, in the flutter of a face, or the jumpy lines of his letters, has slipped away from its purpose.

Outside the US, the multi-layered game with the iridescence of language and its shades can naturally not be understood quite so easily, especially since the English spoken overseas has the reputation of being easy to learn and use. The manageability of American vocabulary and syntax has surely contributed to the success of the world power – and it was in turn



shaped by this use. But American English is far more complex than it may seem; perhaps even more inscrutable than the German used by philosophers. The surface of what seems obvious is pervaded by unpredictable inconsistencies, by the knowledge of codes and the brilliance of imitation. The further the unprepared reader immerses him-/herself in the field between sign and meaning, the more likely s/he will miss how the technique of dry objectivity (which, not without justification, is part of this language’s reputation) also alludes with all its certainties to that which can by no means be checked and which actually nobody has said.

In Raymond Pettibon’s drawings, the inconsistencies are always a little more obvious than a technocrat of propaganda would like. Sometimes he uses the small differences that upset the balance between image and text as an entry into the unsuitable. But that would not be sufficient because he places his figures quite consciously above fault lines. Once the first gap is placed, like a director on remote control, he pushes it apart with further gaps, teases mistake after mistake from them, a process where foreground and sustainability must “yield” in both directions, in the direction of incredibility and coherent simplicity. Hence the familiar getup of his actors: man with weapon, nude woman, hippie with knife, tough gangster. Inside their recognition value, they mean business without much ado, only to cross the border of simple

interpretation in the next step. Punks are suddenly dreamy and gay, women become merciless judges and victims of their own agency, gunmen turn into mother’s boys and start to ponder things – an exposure that Pettibon pursues with an exaggerati-



on that is too obvious because he knows: even the desire for a distance that wants to have seen through the kitsch in the end adheres to the despised cliché.

Only on the condition of taking doubt to the place where it is not accompanied by its own expectations, he writes the history of the American pictorial world: on the edges, the trip starts with the triumph of the craftsmanship of fierce painting and goes to the icons of pop, from the artist’s smudge to the realism of comic strips, to the formulas of American think tanks that grant a privileged place to the last signals of radicalness. Since the signs of the past must make do without any helping commitment, they are much more willing to reveal their limits, collapse into fragments that clearly lack something. With these defects, they fit into the present: the products of propaganda are not credible because their claims are convincing. Rather, in order to be effective, they must activate the convictions of those who want to distribute and perpetuate them. Adroit in the foreground and sustainable in the background – only what is brought together in this tension, communicating its own inconsistency, develops an efficacy that is infectious, an attitude that can impress. Surprising is not the delicacy of the lie, but its obviousness.

Those who wish to establish Raymond Pettibon’s pictorial world within the frame of a political morality that today believes the good is on its side, and thus fit it into the accordingly renovated categories, can merely try to “exonerate” themselves. Of course we might explain that with him, the clichés – the tough guys and naked ladies – are somewhat more complex, that the “false images” on his stage are always taken in by his own convictions. But such an approach will inevitably miss the foundation, his political atheism. And at any rate, his drawings contain instructions for the proper orientation in the current consensus: as one of the many errors in which the characters of his stories encounter one another.

Roberto Ohrt

Translation: Wilhelm v. Werthern

On 18 March 2014 at 7 pm, as part of the exhibition **FRONT ROW** there will be a public conversation with the author about Raymond Pettibon at Contemporary Fine Arts.

Gert & Uwe Tobias

Gert and Uwe Tobias' exhibitions of their large, colourful and highly idiosyncratic woodcuts at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Kunstmuseum Bonn, the Gemeentemuseum in Den Haag, the Whitechapel Gallery in London and the Kupferstichkabinett in Dresden and elsewhere have introduced them to a wide public. Like many other artists of their generation, they are not primarily interested in directly transposing their own emotional inner world or mindset onto the subject chosen. Rather, the individual aspect enters the art indirectly through the joint artistic act, with the brothers filtering existing worlds of images from art history and the mass media through their subjective imaginations and giving these a contemporary lease of life.

Shortly after graduating Gert and Uwe Tobias decided to work together. "We've found a healthy atmosphere of constructive debate", says Gert, "we are well. Everyone does everything." And that works "generally like that: There is a pot and in this pot is anything that makes both of us up. The principle thing is drawing. That's the basis. And with the help of drawing we develop the motifs." The Surrealist artists had already taken part of photographic reality out of context by creating a montage of materials in which elements that where as disparate as possible collided and something new and unexpected arose. "The technique of collage", or so Max Ernst described the Surrealist approach, "is the systematic exploitation of the coincidentally or artificially provoked encounter of two or more disparate elements on a level evidently unsuited to this end – and the poetic spark lit by these realities being brought together".

Gert and Uwe Tobias' woodcuts are not generated in the classical woodprint technique, but in a kind of "puzzle print". They adopted this method more by accident: "One day through trial and error it happened that we rolled a fragment of a sawed out wood piece and printed it on paper. And there we saw potential – or interest – to continue to work." Their exuberant imagination and enjoyment of the grotesque and fantastical are also reflected in the three-dimensional medium of sculpture and have found their own particular form of expression; the artists quickly and expressively model bizarre figures, heads, and containers out of soft clay, which are characterized by a turbulent, lively-rugged, nearly crude seeming surface. The

glaze that is applied, in part in colour, creates a peculiar contrast to this with its smoothness. The Tobias brothers practice a kind of modern anti-magic by instilling industrially made mass products, interchangeable wares, with a new aura through the individual gesture.

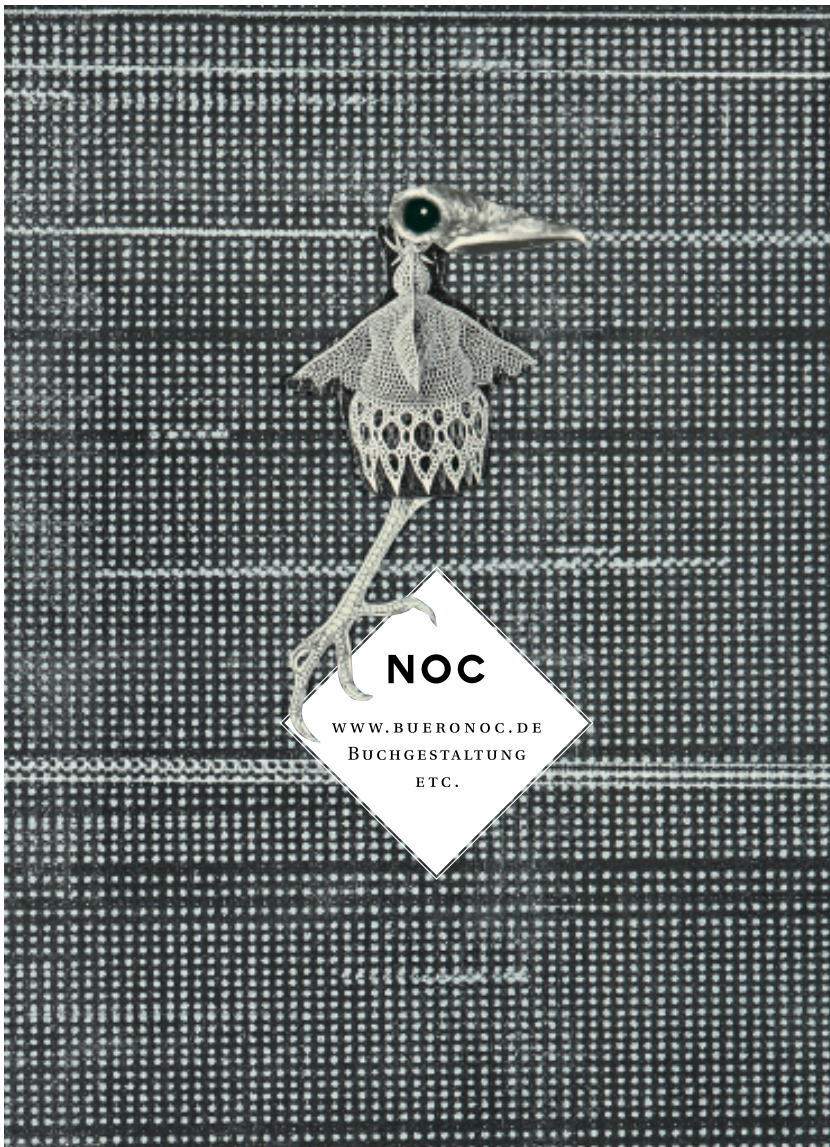
Within the technique there arises a constant seesaw between the motifs. For example the drops of colour on the faces in the wet watercolor become dripping noses in the woodcuts and the embroidery pattern from grandmothers draft books become constructivist raster structures. In the exhibitions the various groups of works are mostly connected with each other visually through wall paintings. The Tobias brothers don't set a particular value on the decoding of their motives: "It is important to us that our work will appear familiar yet strange somehow. We're fascinated by the unclassifiable, the mysterious."

Contemporary Fine Arts will present new works by Gert & Uwe Tobias at Art Cologne from 10-13 April, 2014. (hall 11.3, booth D-028).

Exhibition at Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens in Deurle, Belgium from 6 April to 15 June 2014



FRONT ROW



Imprint

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Jonathan Meese „Frontbibliothek Meese“, Installation View, Buchhandlung Walter König, Cologne, 1999

Tal R

"I have a weakness – artists' books. I have been producing books and books over the years. I've actually reached a point where I'm almost embarrassed at the speed in which I do." With these words the Danish artist Tal R (born 1967 in Israel) describes his passion for artist books. But what exactly is an artist book and what justification does it have in today's multimedia-based world?"

After the turn of the 20th century artists started to express themselves more and more in written form in addition to their actual art production. They published pamphlets and manifestos in which they announced their principles, ambitions and views. Some of the most famous scriptures are certainly the manifestos of Futurism (1909), Dada (1918), Bauhaus (1919) or Surrealism (1924). Later the artists printed complete books in small, limited editions. They were sent to friends, collectors and other artists and were used as communication, networking and expression of opinion. Through the artist book ideas and theories could be spread quickly. Besides texts the books often contained illustrations, original graphics or editions.

Today the internet is mainly used for these purposes. Artists run their own websites, maintain accounts on Facebook, post photos on Instagram or share their thoughts via Twitter. Thus it could be assumed that social networks in the internet have replaced artists' books. Yet numerous artist books are still launched, mostly by small publishing companies, which are nearly exclusively dedicated to this medium. Tal R is one of the artists who has already brought out many books and wants to continue to do so with unabated speed and intensity. At the beginning of this year he has already published five new artist books. He explains this as follows:

"I have no idea why I am like that. I can't recommend it, I'm not proud of making all these books. But it just seems like I need to do it. I have to put them behind me. I have to go deeper into all this material, and books have been such a good tool in doing so. Artists' books on one hand is as slow as playing the flute. Why would anybody do artists' books today, when you can just post stuff on the Internet. I understand that artists' books are weak; I understand that it is absolutely useless. You can't even say it's nostalgic, it's beyond nostalgic. On the other hand, so is painting. In one kind of discussion, painting is also weak and useless. So I think I've made a carrier for myself by finding value in useless places such as artists' books and paintings.

Also for the first time now, I'm on Facebook. I will soon be on every social platform because I slowly understand the charm of it. I also love the idea that I can communicate more directly, without having to go through museums and galleries. I can talk myself. I'm a little slow with these things. It's important to remember that your kids will think of Facebook as just as outdated as I think artists' books are. They will think of Instagram as nostalgic and useless. This is the case with all platforms. So why just not stick with a platform which is already a sinking ship, like artists' books?"

In the exhibition **FRONT ROW** a selection of Tal R's artist books will be on view.

Contemporary Fine Arts will present new paintings by Tal R at Art Cologne from 10-13 April, 2014.
Hall 11.3, booth D-028



Tal R „Invisible Chair“, 2013



Bu Sherwit, 68 x 108 cm, contemporary, recycling material, Morocco

Carpets and art

The alliance of Orient and Occident

Moroccan weavers live in a culture in which a carpet is the main piece of furniture and the center of family life. Traditionally women made colourful small carpets with crazy patterns privately for their homes. This involved no cost as the materials were recycled fabrics. They weren't meant to appeal to a buyer, who would have expected orderly execution, expensive lamb's wool and traditional patterns. A sparkling Lurex jumper out of a western aid delivery or a neon-coloured polyester blanket seemed a thousand times more attractive than the highest quality wool. It was exactly this creative freedom of the early non-commercial pieces which met the western taste. Because they looked modern and like art the private tradition turned into a business idea.

Thomas Wild, trading in oriental carpets for more than twenty years. Owner of "Wild. Teppich- & Textilkunst", Gipsstraße 12 (Sophie-Gips-Höfe), Berlin-Mitte.

Within the context of the exhibition **FRONT ROW** at Contemporary Fine Arts, Thomas Wild will give a lecture on the subject of "Carpets and art – the conjunction of Orient and Occident on March 26, 2014 at 7 pm.



JOHNNY COME HOME

Contemporary Fine Arts is pleased to present an exhibition with work by Jonathan Meese from the year 2006 – a time where the artist was at a peak of creativity.

Today, one might almost be tempted to think that there is nothing left to say about Jonathan Meese because the output of his artistic career, which started in 1998 at the Berlin Biennale, has been so immense. Since then, countless commentaries and reviews have been written about him, and he has been classified in numerous ways, all of which lend the title of his Biennale work, *Ahoi de Angst*, an almost prophetic quality – as if Meese had known that he would sail across wide seas.

Ahoi de Angst was a labyrinthine cabinet of curiosities full of the heroes of teenagers through which one strolled like through the convolutions of a total fan's brain; wildly outfitted with posters of Klaus Kinski, Che Guevara, Bill Clinton, or Romy Schneider, in between posters full of scribbled paintings of figures and words, self-portraits and Grim Reapers, dilettantishly annotated with phrases like "Clan of Clan." There was a TV, a mirror ball, a sofa, and a record player. The whole thing was an energetic ensemble of cult and kitsch, sophisticated culture and soft porn, tragedy and comedy – and even then it stood for what Meese remains to this day: an artist who puts his own person at the service of art and thus retreats behind the work.

However, this universal, indeed impersonal standard does not seem obvious at first sight. The virile names with their dark connotations, leitmotifs in his oeuvre, are part of the educated middle-class canon. But Stalin, Hitler, Wagner, Nietzsche, Caligula, Alex de Large, Darth Vader, and Lautréamont, outside of any conceivable context, lead to absurd title inventions thickly painted, collaged, fragmented-figurative pictorial worlds without contours, qualities which are also displayed in the series of portraits exhibited. Rather emptied of meaning, rumbling

in an adolescent sound reminiscent of the Knights of the Grail, the works there are called *Im 8. Namen des Erzfishes* [In the 8th Name of the Archfish], *Dein Stahlblindes geortetes Geschlechtsteil riecht* [Your Steelblind Located Genital Smells, or *Die Verdammten im Tiertum* [The Female Damned in the Animaldom]. That the superordinate claim in these image-text productions is not immediately clear to everybody is due to the fact that Meese frequently brings his own face and body, the heroes of his youth, and even his own mother into play, linking himself with the historical figures, even appropriating their traits and playing grotesque masques – crowned by seemingly naïve, ostentatiously repeated provocations like casts of erect penises, Hitler salutes, and darkly smoldering prefixes "Erz" and "Arch." But what might easily be mistaken as the display of an inner pandemonium has nothing to do with narcissism. Meese is not interested in Meese himself. Rather, with a playful devotion, he evokes the total openness of being through the "dictatorship of art" – beyond the axioms of inflexible rules and ideologies.

"Art has its own laws which we don't even know. We always try to force our own laws upon art. And it is much more interesting to simply wait and see what it will put in front of us", Meese said in 2006. And: "I hold the sentimental belief that art is still something powerful, something individual that stems itself against the immense bureaucracy that takes everything over." Meese sees art as a dimension that is independent of the artist, as a way of thinking and acting that is an alternative to the increasingly rigid everyday regulations. But can art exist independently – beyond a creator who determines its laws?

The crux of Meese's art – regardless of what medium he works in – is the defence of its myths and archetypes which create a universal world image that goes beyond the individual, including him as an artist. For Meese, the artist must serve art, and thus humanity, and therefore s/he must not pursue

any kind of self-expression. This is why in his work figures keep appearing that embody this universality; they are representative characters, lacking detail, whose essence he reveals, rather than telling individual narratives. By transferring this essence into art, Meese is able to play with such stereotypes – also in combination with the self portrait, which is never personal and weighed down with moods, but like all his other figures clichéd, hermetic, and in a mischievous way saturated with myth. "The self-staging of the figure of the artist by Meese has something consciously exemplary, he foregrounds the exemplary character of the artist", explains Robert Fleck, who attributes the power of his work to its "utopian character". "Meese presents himself with all his representational energy that characterises him, as the sum of all figures and names from German mythology to Darth Vader", writes Friedrich Meschede. "In a certain respect, Jonathan Meese is agnostic, somebody, however, who on his path to salvation does not avoid any puddle and clod of soil, and who thus encounters the dark and evil wherever he goes, and takes on its shadows", writes Veit Lohers. And Susanne Titz speaks of a "collapse of time" in Meese's work, originating from "pure mental work, timelessly unclear, at the same time in many ways offensive, but in a strangely conciliatory way because it reveals something very personal." So – personal after all?

Yes and no. Meese's battles of images cannot be generated from a search engine; it emanates from an individual perception repertory. But Meese filters and reduces this until he gets to the core of things – just like Picasso's women's portraits and Van Gogh's self-portraits get their life not from illustration, but from transcending mere ego. Meese sees himself as a "soldier of art" – as somebody who serves a free intellectual and aesthetic space, reveals the possibilities of poetry and lyricism, and in this way holds up social limitations as a mirror to the beholder.

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