

Otto Muehl

Paintings from 1988

630 Greenwich Street, Maccarone, NY

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PSYCHO

In connection with Otto Muehl's *Besenschlagbildern* ('Broomstroke Paintings'), made around 1988, exists video documentation of the artist dressed up as an elderly lady, painting in front of a circle of his life partners from the *Aktions-Analytische Kommune* ('Action Analysis Commune'), who cheer him on vociferously. Involuntarily one can be reminded of the schizophrenic murderer Norman Bates, dressed as his mother in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. Even if Muehl's *Malaktion* ('Painting Action') retains its own humoristic effect, it is however precisely the demonstrative transcendence of limitations *ad absurdum* and the violent painting gestures. The artist whacks the paint onto the canvas with a broom as if he had gone berserk producing an atmosphere of ambivalence and disconcertment. It's possible that Muehl's complex relationship with his mother, who in the dementia of her old age adored her son yet also rejected him as morally depraved, played a role in the psychodynamics of this mirroring scene.

This video document is connected to a feature film made in the commune about Andy Warhol, *Andys Cake 1988-1991* - a homage to the artist who died so young at the peak of his fame in 1987. This film is part of a series shot at the Commune about some of the giants of bourgeois art and cultural history, such as Van Gogh, Picasso, Wittgenstein and, as mentioned, Warhol. With the possibilities of the narrative film at his disposal, Muehl ironically paraphrases, using psychoanalytical interpretations to make fun of his subjects' personality structures. In *Andys Cake*, he slips into the role of Julia Warhola to this end: we know from Warhol's biography about his close, almost neurotic relationship with his mother. In a key scene of the film, Andy introduces his friend Gerard Malanga to the woman (Muehl), who is painting in one of the studios of the Factory, and the latter reacts with the provocative question: "Well, aren't I better than Andy?" Both of them answer placatingly, undermining her motherly authority ironically with "Sure, sure!"

With regard to this leitmotiv of the mother-son relationship, which is so prominent here, a far-ranging scope of interpretation opens up within the context of the hypotheses of Freud and Lacan on the development of sexuality in early childhood and its taming through art. Precisely when the subject is that of abstract-gestural painting, references can be made to the repeated interpretation of it as childlike gesticulating, infantile trail-making, and "painting with shit". Like many other artists, Muehl occupied this field of action early on - precisely in order to shit on the affirmative and ideological in art, demonstratively and with relish. Muehl's early *Materialbilder* ('Material Paintings') and *Materialaktionen* ('Material Actions'), with which he co-founded Viennese Actionism in the early 1960s, were radical and fundamental, but also idealistic gestures of rebellion and revolution - at that time the main issue being the radical transvaluation of all values. However, around 1970, he became so disillusioned by the apparently insurmountable dichotomy between rebellion and affirmation in art and the consequent failure of the revolution, that he reacted by dropping out of the art system altogether and founding the *Aktions-Analytische Kommune* ('Action Analysis Commune'). Muehl's transformation from an avant-gardist to a postmodernist was now complete, and in the alternative world of the commune he no longer attributes expressive-

gestural abstraction in painting any deeper psycho-hygienic and socio-political effect. On the contrary, in the material paintings of the second half of the 1980s, he presents it as a short-term egomaniacal increase in pleasure for the subjected artist, and demonstrates with sovereign self-irony its genesis as an elitist fetish of the development of economic and political power.

A curatorial statement by Hubert Klocker

For more information on the exhibition, please call the gallery at 212 431 4977 or email press@maccarone.net. Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday 10 AM - 6 PM.