

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

André Thomkins Works 1946 – 1985

Hauser & Wirth Zürich

28 March – 30 May 2015

Opening: Friday 27 March, 6 – 8 pm

Hauser & Wirth presents an exhibition of works by Swiss artist André Thomkins (1930 – 1985), whose capacious and supple imagination produced a standalone and category-defying oeuvre, encompassing uncanny drawings, music, sculptures, paintings and wordplay. With a focus on the masterworks Thomkins created during the 1960s and 1970s, this exhibition includes work spanning his entire career, highlighting both a mastery of classical techniques and an avant-garde approach.

Celebrated as a 'Schwebesel' (floating soul) by friends and fellow artists for his autonomous artmaking, Thomkins spent much of his life in Germany where he was actively involved with the Fluxus movement. He was life-long friends with the likes of Daniel Spoerri and Dieter Roth, with whom he shared an experimental approach to language and use of everyday materials. Thomkins's connection to Roth, a central artist in Hauser & Wirth's history and identity, alludes to his enduring voice in the canon of art history. Thomkins's practice remains a touchstone for a younger generation of artists, including Peter Fischli & David Weiss.



In his early drawings, Thomkins experimented with delicate multi-directional configurations as a breeding ground for unique, iconographic creations. Closely interspersed vertical lines become enlivened by small figures or surreal details which break the pattern of the regular hatchings. These delicate ink and pencil works reveal Thomkins's own wonderful world of fantastic forms and figures, populated by puppet-like beings. With limited shaded pencil marks, the earliest work in the show, 'homunculus' (1946), evokes ancient deities and Egyptian mummification and strikes an eerie note of post-war self-identification – it is thought to be a self-portrait as Thomkins often portrayed himself with crossed arms.

From afar, the complex multi-coloured grid of 'Niederland' (Netherland) (1965) appears uniform, but closer inspection reveals the artist's mastery of working in miniature with the detail of a falling figure in red striped trousers, a couple embracing, and a floating staircase. In a stylistic series begun in the mid-1960s that he called the Rapportmuster (Repeat Patterns), Thomkins's inventive practice of treating the pattern as generative field revisits the idea of Leonardo da Vinci described in his 'Treatise on Painting' that an artist should be able to find a landscape within a stain upon a wall – an exercise akin to the art of Dada and Surrealism.

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Even though the themes of repeating patterns, fantastic architecture and collage existed as distinctive threads of inquiry across Thomkins's oeuvre, elements of each of these motifs come together in various works, such as 'Blut-Milch-Zirkulation' (Blood-Milk-Circulation) (1970), 'GB' (1975) as well as 'wer hat den Kürbiskern verschluckt?' (who has swallowed the pumpkin seed?) completed in the year of Thomkins's death, 1985. This last painting, split into quadrants, mimics the artist's earlier collage in its layering of coloured blocks and shapes, as well as playing with spatial relationships on various scales.



Thomkins's play with motif and technique across his career – and the way in which distinct avenues of investigation interlink in single works – demonstrates a virtuosity and a greater vision of his art. Viewed as a whole, the exhibition at Hauser & Wirth highlights the inventiveness of an artist who had a deft hand and an agile mind.

About the Artist

André Thomkins was born in Lucerne, Switzerland in 1930. He worked most of his life in Germany where he died in 1985. During his lifetime he exhibited little, preferring to work independently of institutions and galleries. Major exhibitions of his work occurred only after his untimely death, introducing his practice to a new audience. In 1989 and 1990, his extensive oeuvre was shown in a retrospective exhibition in Berlin and Lucerne. In 1999, coinciding with the publication of the catalogue raisonné of his work by the Swiss Institute for Art Research, the Kunstmuseum Bern brought his work into focus again with the show 'Traumscene' (Dream Scene). Recent solo exhibitions include 'Lackskins' at Bündner Kunstmuseum, Chur, Switzerland (2012); the touring retrospective 'André Thomkins. Eternal Network', Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Liechtenstein, Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, Germany and Neue Galerie, Graz, Austria (2013 – 2014), and 'André Thomkins. Zeichnungen und Lackskins', Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland, 2013.

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GB
1975
watercolour and opaque white on paper
24.5 x 16.7 cm

Niederland
1965
watercolour on paper, mounted on
gessoed wood
21.5 x 23 cm

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