

CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS

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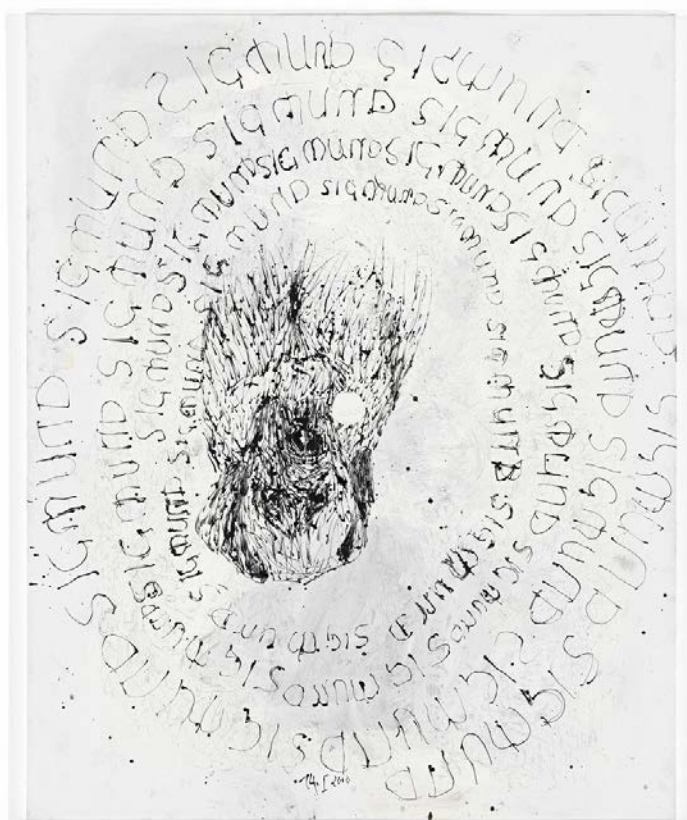
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GEORG BASELITZ

"Sigmund's Cave"

01 October – 14 November 2015



Georg Baselitz, "Sigmunds Höhle", 2000

Contemporary Fine Arts is pleased to present their fourth solo exhibition with Georg Baselitz (*1938, Deutschbaselitz).

When Georg Baselitz paints dogs or other animals, they belong first of all, just like landscapes, still lifes, nudes, and portraits, to the conventional, "banal" themes that are supposed to distract as little as possible from painting as such. The series of dog paintings that Georg Baselitz painted in the winter and spring of 1999/2000, is fundamentally different compared to his older dog paintings. The reduction of the palette to black and white, the brushstroke that seems more like drawn rather than painted, the strictly symmetrical composition, the stereotypical representation of always the same dog, standing on its head, as a motionless and expressionless frontal bust, and the

integration of writing lend the series an emblematic and pointedly distanced character. That the Name "Sigmund" is placed prominently in large letters above the dogs makes clear that these are not just mere dog portraits, but rather masks and codes of the Freudian universe, and that the beholder should be prepared for numerous hidden allusions as well as suppressed and repressed things. Cool, ironical, and enthusiastically playing with words, Baselitz, as it were, brings out his inner Duchampian dog, but the sometimes monumental formats of up to 250 x 200 cm and the multi-layered application of paint demonstrate that the visual is by no means sacrificed to the conceptual.

That Baselitz becomes similar to his subject is first of all not unusual. "Everything is a self-portrait, whether it is a tree or a nude. Everything you perceive is a reflection of yourself", he said in conversation with Michael Auping, three years before he painted the dog pictures. But here, identification goes much further. It is well-known that Baselitz (like before him Jackson Pollock) always paints his works on the floor, leaning forwards and turning all the time, like children do when they draw. In the larger formats of his dog series, we can see the painter's shoe prints, they are like the "paw traces" indices of a horizontal activity, facing the floor. The painter needs to bend down, crouch down next to or on the painting, kneel or crawl on it on all fours like a dog. "Feet are my grounding, and grounding is more important to me than broadcasting", he says about this. "Funnily enough, I paint crouching, I walk across the paintings." Doggy-style painting, as it were. In the body-fixated 1990s, which Baselitz ends with his dog series, there is an increase of artists identifying with dogs, and the work of artists like Jackson Pollock is reinterpreted from a psychoanalytical perspective that emphasizes the cynic-materialist aspect: away from the visual, idealistic, and vertical, in favour of the anal and horizontal, of the dog perspective. Generally, we can relate Baselitz's rebellion against abstract painting, which dominated art well into the 1960s and which he at the time countered with very physical, ugly paintings, to Diogenes' revolt against the "fraud of idealistic abstractions and the schizoid dullness of cerebral thinking" informed by Platonic philosophy. It is tempting to view the turning of the paintings by 180 degrees, which he started in 1969, not just as a mere distraction from content and a desire to direct attention to pure painting, but to also identify it with a Nietzschean "transvaluation of values," which Diogenes calls "recoining the coin", which brings to the top that which had been suppressed. The reversal of motifs gains such a meaning at the latest with the dog series.

Excerpt from the text "Painting *doggystyle*, as it were" by Anselm Wagner, from the catalogue "Sigmund's Cave", published by Snoeck on the occasion of the exhibition.

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