

**CONTEMPORARY FINE ARTS**  
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# **NORBERT SCHWONTKOWSKI**

## **DIE VON DA**

22 January – 2 March 2019



Norbert Schwontkowski, *Untitled*, 2009-2012  
Oil, pigment on canvas, 90.5 x 60 cm

**Contemporary Fine Arts** is pleased to present **Norbert Schwontkowski's** *Die von da*, the gallery's sixth exhibition of works by the artist. CFA represented Norbert Schwontkowski from 2004 until his untimely passing in 2013 and has represented his estate since then.

*Die von da* turns its attention to the illuminated openings that recur throughout Schwontkowski's oeuvre, focusing on paintings made in the last decade of his life. These breaches take the form of windows and doorways, holes in mysterious landscapes, lanterns, top hats and bathtubs. His illuminated thresholds usher us into a melancholy dreamscape, imagining a mirror or a cracked vase as the rabbit holes that could contain its vastness.

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Schwontkowski's landscapes are often described as in-between places, occupying the "gap between the mythical and the mundane" (Blind Faith, "Schwontkowskiesque", Jens Hoffman). He renders these places in a milky light using pulverized pigments, linseed oil, metal oxide, binding colors and bone glue. Neither here, nor there, the solitary character enveloped in endless expanse, anchored by a lonely landmark. And often moving towards a light. Schwontkowski senses the potency in empty space. Foucault's insistence upon emptiness as essential in contemporary times resonates: "It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance. For this void does not create a deficiency; it does not constitute a lacuna that must be filled. It is nothing more, and nothing less, than the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think."

Schwontkowski was drawn to the illuminated window, held in a momentary frame. In his meditative text *Travelling at Twilight*, he describes train travel and its fleeting glimpses to elucidate his process:

I. Here I am sitting, looking through the window of the compartment like a magic mirror, and my gaze falls on a house in this small town, somewhere, falls through an illuminated window, behind which, in the warmth of the parlor, an approximately forty-year-old woman is bending over a table at the other end of which I seem to be sitting and holding a glass of red wine in my hand, silently gazing at this woman, while she blows the smoke from her cigarette at me, showing her white teeth, and she looks at me, looks at me as I write, and now nods in confirmation, for I am writing a story, or rather I am trying to write just a single sentence which might record a certain but unclear meaning, while my gaze now falls across the table, past the woman, through the window at the train which slowly rolls by.

II. After a curve the train now goes over a bridge and under the bridge flows the river and again my gaze falls on the eyes of a fisherman, who standing in a wooden boat, is directing his gaze at the eyes of the wriggling fish as he pulls the hook out of its mouth.

The journey as a path towards illumination bears the trace of Schwontkowski's early experience with the Catholic church. His lifelong spirituality, as well as a wry and self-deprecating humor, are inextricable from his work. His interest in the Japanese woodcut tradition Ukiyo-e, which translates literally as "pictures of the floating world," is also significant.

The paintings in *Die von da* are accompanied by a selection of works on paper made between 1982 and 2003 where Schwontkowski returns insistently to the figure of the head. Schwontkowski would have been seventy this year and will be recognized with his largest posthumous institutional exhibitions to date, opening at the Kunstmuseum Bonn in October 2019 and travelling to the Gemeentemuseum den Haag and Kunsthalle Bremen.

Norbert Schwontkowski (1949 – 2013) lived and worked between Bremen and Berlin. Selected solo exhibitions include Kolumba Museum Cologne (2013), Kunstverein Hamburg (2013), Rubell Family Collection Miami (2006), Brandenburgische Kunstsammlungen Cottbus (2005), Kunsthalle Erfurt (2005), Kunsthalle Bremen (2004).

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