



Hanspeter Hofmann

Lucy

Opening: 16/11/2010, 7 pm

Exhibition: 17/11/2010 – 23/12/2010

Press release:

Fourteen portraits of chimpanzees, painted with a few black brushstrokes on a monochrome and flashy background are set in a loose image sequence.

They present themselves with different gesture and mimic – from angry and grumpy over amused and playful to contemplative cowered – they cover a wide spectrum of emotions. Following the manner of pop art, they are created in the idea of Warhol's principle of duplication and isolation of the motif from the background.

A complete different language of painting is spoken by further large-sized works, which show orang-utans in semiprofiles. We know the vocabulary of the magnified white lines that summarize to cell structures from laboratory samples that build the background of those more painterly portraits, from earlier abstract works by Hanspeter Hofmann.

The photographic models originate from the academic study "Menschenaffen – Mutter und Kind" (Basel 1996) by the zoologist Jörg Hess, who studied the three ape families of the Basel Zoo over decades. But they could as well have illustrated René Descartes' text "*Les passions de l'âme*" (*Passions of the soul*) from 1649. Descartes assumed that vital spirits, which are located in nerves, trigger the muscles to a certain facial expression. The fact that the single portraits are titled with forenames emphasises the idea that Hofmann is using those ape portraits to depict characteristic traits of the human face.

It seems that Hanspeter Hofmann has given with those works an illustration to his search for a formula of the interaction between art and science that sets his former allusion to fundamental vital processes a motivic endpoint. Further the great ape is at least since the 19th century an important object of research, especially in finding interferences between the evolution and behaviours to the human. The main concern in the work of Hanspeter Hofmann is to make out the points of contact between artistic and scientific approaches. He discusses this dispute about painting as an "Allotriion" (Allotriion: greek: "another way"). Like a scientist Hofmann is mainly interested in bypasses, which circuit around the aim and show him new branch lines. This gets obvious in a further serial of five paintings, which are kept in bright shades of grey. The artist refers in those to earlier charcoal drawings, which he transformed through different methods of enlargement and positive/ negative inversion. The resulting organic structures seem to be frozen on the canvas for one moment, but they contain the potential to move into another shape in the next one.

Even in the title of the exhibition "lucy" resonates the balance between art and science, which Hanspeter Hofmann aspires in his works, as it stands as a symbol for the interconnection between both. During the archaeological excavation of the best preserved skeleton of the ancestor of men, the Beatles' song *Lucy in the sky with diamonds* was played constantly and therefore the trove was given the name *Lucy*.

Nikola Dietrich

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