

kerstin engholm galerie

Schleifmühlgasse 3 A-1040 Wien T +43 1 585 7337 F +43 1 585 7338 office@kerstinengholm.com

HENDRIK KRAWEN Motiv

Opening: 9.11.2001, 7 p.m.

Duration of exhibition: 9.12 – 27.10.2001

Motiv, the title of the exhibition of paintings by the artist Hendrik Krawen (born 1963 in Lübeck; lives in Berlin today) makes a tacit reference to what constitutes the enigma of his latest work. His stringent, almost entirely horizontally formatted and oriented paintings have until now been the focus of attention especially in the Rhineland context (Krawen studied with Hüppi until 1990).

The crucial question ("What do we see in the paintings?") has, to date, mainly been answered by recourse to a description of the rich details of Krawen's motifs that he develops with great care and precision in his paintings. His pictures of demolition ruins and ships (which seem particularly interesting in an art historical sense as a continuation of romantic ideas and notions) as well as the painterly elaboration of pieces of urban construction such as facades and cornices – as well as logos – together with personal objects such as lamps, books, records, etc., suggest that Krawen is a painter whose selection of motifs and skillful juxtaposition results in a collection of quotes taken from various styles and epochs. Indeed, Krawen is a very careful observer of his surroundings. His pictures bespeak an intense preoccupation with our environment and what we perceive as well as what we like to overlook.

In his new large-format works, Krawen has enlarged his motifs to almost monstrous proportions (until now he has generally moved the motifs to the lower edge of the painting). The striking presence of, say, a monument dedicated to Ernst Thälmann, which Krawen discovered in East Berlin, is almost horrific in the painterly rendition. With this painting, Krawen is making a statement as a contemporary by using him to narrate the unconscious preoccupation with this urban emblem. Each bit of graffiti covering the Ernst Thälmann monument refers to the presence of this symbolic figure that has long sunken into history and is largely irrelevant to life today. At the same time the question as to its *meaning* poses itself whenever one looks at these motives that have been blown up to monumental proportions. Why precisely this motif? Why not another one? Undoubtedly, the paintings all refer to the city of Berlin. Krawen's pictures of demolition ruins let this series of works that he already began in Düsseldorf appear in a new light. However, Krawen would have dealt just as intensively with Wuppertal, if he had only been there; here, too, he would have looked about and collected motifs. Krawen did not succumb to Berlin. Here he was basically after something very different. The crucial quality in Krawen's paintings is that he focuses on showing a *void*. The motifs only serve him as a means to focus primarily on the background of the picture so as to open up the pictorial space inordinately. It is a basic principle of photography that a motif in the foreground enhances the depth of field. A branch in the foreground lets the bay of Mallorca appear in a much better light, evoking feelings of desire. The same could not be said of an aerial shot. It seems as if Krawen has adopted this principle for his painting: "I could also paint clouds" – Krawen once said. In doing so, however, he would occupy the pictorial space in a much too obvious way. The even application of broken colors – a pale violet, a strange green – this enables the gaze to travel into an open depth from which nothing is to be gained, nothing that could stand up to the usual interpretations of monochrome painting or of landscape painting. Krawen is interested in this undefined expanse, in generating a pictorial depth that cannot be described in clear terms. For this one needs a motif.

Text: Maren Lübke

For detailed information on the exhibition, please contact Kerstin Engholm or Eva Kernbauer at (43) 1 585 7337.