

kerstin engholm galerie

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HINTERLANDS

Bas Jan Ader Matti Braun

Daniel Pflumm Stefan Sandner

Opening: May 15, 2002, 7 p.m.

Exhibition duration: May 16 - June 29, 2002

Press release

The oeuvre of the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader who has resurfaced within the contemporary art discourse in recent years represents the historical reference point in the concept of the exhibition „hinterlands“. Against the backdrop of his particularly topical work, a look at the more recent production of a younger generation of artists such as Matti Braun, Stefan Sandner and Daniel Pflumm reveals perspectives that to date have hardly been taken note of in the reception of their works, especially in the way formal strategies merge with a thematic interest in the constructive nature of subjectivity.

Bas Jan Ader's oeuvre is marked by an aesthetic of strictly formalized representation of emotions. While assimilating the rigid documentary structure typical of 60'ies Concept Art for his work, he did not follow its negation of artistic subjectivity. On the contrary, Ader's works are accompanied by an aesthetic of (personal) failure. If it wasn't for the mysterious tragedy of his early death (in 1975 he set sail from Cape Cod in a small boat with the intention of crossing the Atlantic in 60 days; in 1976 his wrecked ship was found, his body missing) one could associate with him the tragic-comedy of Buster Keaton. His four-part work "On the Road to a New Neo Plasticism" points in this direction. In this performance he cites the strict formalism of Mondrian, a representative of modernism who, in his reductionist compositions, made the dictum of form as an autonomous artistic idiom extremely compelling. In 1971, the lanky Bas Jan Ader throws himself, dressed entirely in black, onto a blue blanket that has carefully been laid on the ground. His extended arms and legs result in the typical Mondrian grid structure, two plastic containers in red and yellow completed the desperate and depleted gesture which Ader used to mock his spiritual fathers.

The works on view in this exhibition can be seen in this field between rigidly formalized conceptualization and emotional involvement: Stefan Sandner's reference to Kenneth Noland's work "Ova Ray" (1976) stands out for its precise reconstruction of the form of the canvas. The citation of a style of which the uniqueness has meanwhile been praised in countless books on art history - something that must invariably trigger off a crisis in contemporary artists - is ironically undermined by the title: „Dah-uh-ah-uh-aht“. Evidently, the "ingenuity" of the father generation of avantgarde artists has opened so many wounds in the contemporary generation working in the field of cultural production that the only salvation is a turn to popular culture. In the 300 x 900 cm large wall-/text piece "ASK BOB" Sandner cites a page of readers' questions taken from "MuscleMag International - The 'What's New' Magazine of Bodybuilders".

Daniel Pflumm's condensed oeuvre has grown out of his year-long experience in popular culture. The outgrowth of the lively 90ies Berlin club culture, Pflumm's light boxes appear to be derivatives of a different life in the context of art. His formal idiom addresses our culture of memory, referring to elements of popular culture that accompany us in our everyday life (advertisement, video clips, etc.), but are unable to claim a place for themselves in so-called high culture. Matti Braun draws the viewer's attention with his ensemble of reflective blocks, mirrors and styrofoam balls. What appears to be a strictly formalized sculptural piece, also referencing theoretical highlights of the Sixties (buzzword: context theory) ultimately proves to be paying homage to everyday culture. The latter, however, vanishes in the monstrous representation by undergoing a process of abstraction. The "material" (the styrofoam balls alluding to cocaine) can only be caught after keen scrutiny.

The stringent formalism one might first notice in the works exhibited in "hinterlands" has one central message: the viewer is asked to step behind the form and to grasp contemporary artistic production as an expression of individual, personal action.

For more detailed information on the exhibition please contact the gallery on +43 1 585 73 37.