

Christoph Ruckhäberle

16th May – 16th August 2009

The migros museum für gegenwartskunst is presenting the painter Christoph Ruckhäberle (born 1972 in Pfaffenhofen, lives and works in Leipzig) in his first solo exhibition in Switzerland. The visual world of Ruckhäberle, who studied animated film at the California Institute of the Arts before his studies at the Academy of Visual Arts Leipzig, is peopled by odd hard-edged figures, standing in front of coloured rhythmic backgrounds. Colourful drawings of faces recall carved masks, composed from a rich and playful vocabulary of forms. These forms, and the wealth of colours in Ruckhäberle's works, are broken not only by skewed visual angles or perspectival inconsistencies, but also through the use of expressionist and surreal borrowings.

For this exhibition, Christoph Ruckhäberle is presenting two groups of works from his most recent output. In the first, the painter is displaying a series of drawings of formally reduced faces in a dense hanging. The second cycle of works comprises large paintings featuring bizarre forms and angular, disproportional beings with contorted, buckled or unnaturally shortened limbs. The numerous drawings of over-long, alienated, coloured faces in the first group bear witness to the artist's delight in experimentation. The vivid colours, as well as the chiselled and schematic effect of the facial features, lend the faces a mask-like quality. Ancient mask traditions are not limited only to Oceanic or African cultures, but have existed in European countries as objects used in cultural and ritual processes. There are, accordingly, extensive ethnographic, sociological and art historical discourses on the subject of the mask in art. Such references are taken up by the artist, and at the level of a visual redrafting are further put into question by dint of their new form. In the graphically drawn works, Ruckhäberle's transformation process follows Claude Lévi-Strauss in an understanding of the masks not as isolated objects, but as embedded products of historical myth, properties and functions. The relatively rapid creation process of the small-scale drawings, compared to that of his paintings, gives Ruckhäberle the opportunity to test the direct, immediate expression and mimicry of the masks. The pictures evidence a freedom in the play of forms, arrangement and alteration of the proportions of the face. The distribution of sharply separated colour fields over the surface of the picture plane reveals Ruckhäberle's affinity with the linocut, a medium with which the artist has worked for a long time.

The life-size figures in Ruckhäberle's canvasses are stylised bodies which, in contrast to their wallpaper-like background, dissolve away. In his pictures Ruckhäberle seeks neither spatial illusion based on fine gradations of shadowing of the body nor a mimetic illustration of an everyday world. The painter is engaged with a system of combinations of various forms and expressions – in search of a "formula for clichés". The figures have a movement within them that lends the pictures liveliness. The precise and accomplished interplay between static and dynamic body parts reflects Ruckhäberle's study of animated film, in which the process of movement is painstakingly studied. The work titles such as *Dancer II* (2007) or *Akrobat* (2008), which the painter gives in order to lend the pictures descriptive argument, on the one hand indicate activity, but on the other also represent artistic figures. Here Ruckhäberle demonstrates his fascination with the rich tradition of the Japanese theatre forms of Bunraku and Kabuki. The operating mode of symbolic and stylised masks in this genre of theatre has been described by Roland Barthes in the book *Empire of Signs* (1970). The spaces in which Ruckhäberle's figures are located suggest a variety of theatre stage. A precise observation of the background makes it plain that there is no horizontal floor offering a surface on which the figures could stand. The floor seems swung open, making the constructed stage disappear into surreal ornamentation. The abstraction of spatial structure can be followed as Ruckhäberle develops his visual worlds. Whereas in his earlier works one met with large groups of figures, over the last few years Ruckhäberle has consistently reduced the numbers of figures until he has arrived at just one per picture. Thus, in a corresponding sequential development the populated, silent arrangements of enfeebled, melancholic young people of earlier works have more attributes than his later protagonists. The interaction between the figures disappears in favour of the liveliness of the individual in the picture.

Born in Pfaffenhofen, Bavaria, Ruckhäberle studied animated film between 1991 and 1992 at the California Institute of Arts Valencia, and graduated in his Master studies in Leipzig under Prof. Arno Rink. Manifesta 7 in Trentino, Italy (2008), the *Life After Death* exhibition at the Frye Art Museum, Seattle (2007), *Triumph of Painting* in the Saatchi Gallery, London (2006), and Mass MoCA, Massachusetts (2005) are some of the numerous venues at which his work has been shown.

Exhibition curator, Heike Munder.

CATALOGUE: the artist is producing his own artist's book for the exhibition.

PUBLIC GUIDED TOURS: Sunday 17th and 31st May, 14th and 28th June, 16th August at 3pm and Thursday 4th June and 13th August at 6.30pm.

FAMILY GUIDED TOURS: Sunday 14th June at 1.30pm. The tour is 90 minutes long and is appropriate for families. The tour includes practical work.

CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS IN THE SUMMER HOLIDAYS: for the Christoph Ruckhäberle exhibition the museum, in cooperation with FerienSpaß, is offering an educational workshop for children. Children are helped in a playful way to discover the many faces and figures in Ruckhäberle's exhibition. This culminates in a practical workshop with the children working with their own coloured paper and other materials.

Suitable for 6 – 12-year-olds

Enrol at: www.gz-zh.ch/ferienpass

Director: Brigit Meier, Education in Art

Further information at: kunstvermittlung@migrosmuseum.ch

Workshop times: Tuesday 14th July, Friday 7th August and Wednesday 12th August 10.00 – 12.30.

OPENING HOURS: Tues / Wed / Fri Midday–6pm, Thurs Midday–8pm, Sat / Sun 11am–5pm. Entrance to the museum is free from 5pm–8pm every Thursday.

BANK HOLIDAYS: The museum will be closed on Whit Monday 1st June. On Thursday 21st May the museum is open from 11am to 5pm.

migros museum für gegenwartskunst
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The migros museum für gegenwartskunst is an institution of the Migros Culture Percentage.
www.kulturprozent.ch