

NEW YORK

Matthias Groebel

Ulrik

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By Madeline Casteel

October 11, 2023 2:36 pm



Late one night in Cologne circa 1989, Matthias Groebel had his television on mute in his home—it was in this moment that he found the images that would come to occupy his paintings. At Ulrik, a selection of these haunting works are on view—the artist's first New York exhibition in twenty years. For these pieces, Groebel eschewed depicting celebrities or recognizable figures, opting for anonymous characters, rendered in grainy detail, from low-budget broadcast programs instead. For instance, *Untitled (156)*, 1995, shows a man, hair slicked into a ponytail and (presumably) naked, save for a gold chain. He appears to be wincing, but the expression on his face is indecipherable—it could be ecstasy, or even pain. The words BIRD MAN and a circular fluorescent light linger over his shoulder. To make the works in this presentation, Groebel input TV footage into Deluxe Paint, an editing software that can be programmed to separate an image into layers based on traditional painting techniques. He then processed this information into a machine of his own design fitted with airbrush dispensers to sequentially build his one-meter-square canvases. Television allowed for Groebel to access all manner of subcultural detritus, guided by an impulse to hold onto something fleeting: a form of memory that lasts only briefly.

A group of later works here, based on photographs taken by Groebel himself, continue the artist's granulated, low-resolution language. In *Untitled (061)*, 2003, a shirtless musician is adumbrated by a greenish glow, his sweat palpable via glistening pixelated dabs of paint. Even though his "hand" is mitigated by the machine, Groebel's presence is felt everywhere. A lurking familiarity pervades *Untitled (176)*, 2002, which is based on a picture that was taken near the gallery, but two decades prior. Pinkish-gray fish rendered with a lifeless sheen are amassed in a plastic container—a yellow price tag reading 1.99, written in faded black Sharpie, is wedged into the composition's right-hand corner. The work funnels us back into a slippage of ordinary memory; it reflects our own accumulation of images, ingested yet forgotten.

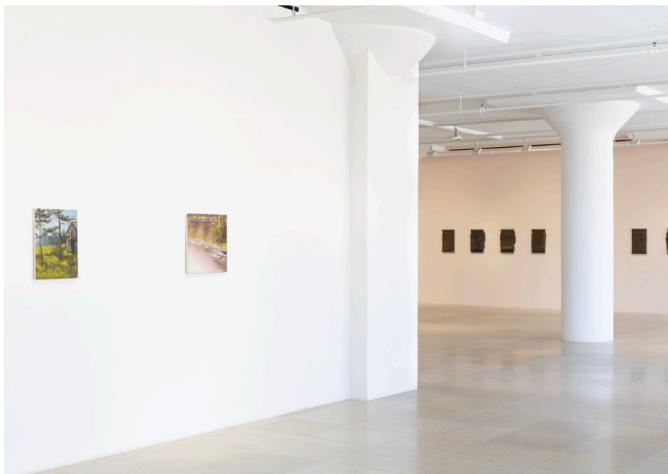
TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Reviews

BORING PAINTING

JOEL DANILEWITZ ON ULL HOHN AT GREENE NAFTALI, NEW YORK

June 2, 2023



"Ull Hohn: No Great Mysteries," Greene Naftali, New York, 2023, installation view

Greene Naftali's recent exhibition of Ull Hohn's work, "No Great Mysteries," curated by the gallery's senior director Monika Senz, underscores the late German artist's interest in painting as a site of banal pleasure. The show features a suite of untitled feces-like reliefs – eight 20 x 26 in. panels covered in a brown, excremental plaster – as well as a series of five small landscapes referencing American painter Bob Ross, and other untitled works of splatter-enamel that invoke – and complicate – the style of Hohn's contemporaries. Hohn lived with HIV/AIDS, and during his career he made subtle responses to the violently passive, neoliberal culture of the 1980s, which have been shown around the world following his death in 1993. The selection at Greene Naftali by necessity reiterates aspects of earlier Hohn shows at Algas Greenspon and American Fine Arts, and a handful of previously unseen works continue to signal his interest in boredom as a potential aesthetic register.

Hohn's landscapes at Greene Naftali illuminate a throughline between the motivations of Gerhard Richter and Bob Ross, contrasting the former – the father figure of neo-expressionist art – with the latter – contemporary painting's beloved yet estranged uncle. Hohn's 1993 *Untitled* series highlights notions of taste by pairing Richter with Ross, who is a celebrated emblem of "lowbrow" American genre painting. Ross's televised landscape painting demonstrations gained huge audiences who could appreciate their accessibility and his comforting presence. Whether out of boredom or obsession, Hohn braids these two styles in his work throughout the show, foreclosing the audience's pursuit of rigid taste through scandalously mundane, terrestrial scenery.

For the first time in over ten years, the late German painter Ull Hohn, who had trained at the Kunsthakademie Düsseldorf under Gerhard Richter before moving to New York in 1986, is honored with a comprehensive solo show in the United States. "No Great Mysteries" emphasizes Hohn's interest in boredom and the mundane as a potential aesthetic register: while previously unexhibited works of enamel and varnish are reminiscent of amateur decorative ceramics, the landscapes on display deploy techniques suggestive of Richter, yet present boring imagery that evokes the televisually mediated comfort of Bob Ross and his painting. While prior exhibitions of Hohn emphasized his interest in degeneracy and abjection, his recent show at Greene Naftali is, as Joel Danilewitz lays out, a banal journey. The title, too, gives into this mission, promising to be so unsurprising and profane as to exhaust any contrived attempts at profundity.

For a 1993 solo exhibit at Colin de Land's gallery American Fine Arts (AFA), Hohn himself had commented on Ross's pedagogy and provided a further appropriation of Ross's philosophy, citing a quotation from him: "There are no great mysteries to painting. You only need the desire to paint, a few basic techniques, and a little practice." [1] Hohn conflated Ross's demonstrations with what was expected of high art at the time, through smudges and smears, deploying aspects of Richter's quotidian facture in provocatively conventional settings such as a remote cabin or a gentle stream. *Untitled* (1992/93) is a 16 x 18 in. generic depiction of a snowy mountain, its peak gently emerging from a rosy haze. It reminds one of Ross's "majestic mountains" with its sloping, alpine-dotted bends and curves. Instead of foregrounding the scene in verdant grass, like Ross would, Hohn effaces the mountain's setting in a white, pinkish abstraction. And where Ross's details sought to emulate nature itself, Hohn deploys Richter's palette knife technique, with its scrapes and smears redistributing the mountain snow. Though Richter has his own set of landscapes, for instance his chilly 1968–69 *Corsica* works, Hohn's inclusion of Richter's technique is more reminiscent of Richter's *Wald* series from 1990 with its horizontal trails of colors. Hohn's depiction of the wild is less the pastoral and austere romance of Richter's scenes and more the rugged, lumbersexual succor of Ross's. However, Hohn inscribed the pictures with allusions to the institutional stalwarts of contemporary painting to blur the distinction between Ross's and Richter's respective motivations. Hohn differentiates himself from these two artists by appearing lethargic in the face of beauty. This attitude can be read in his commitment to depicting subjects perceived as passé in art, such as natural landscapes.

While received art historical paradigms relegate the languid, prosaic works of Ross to kitsch, Hohn's renderings of the Rossian landscape amplify their strange ambience, a quality closely connected to the visual culture of broadcast television. The relationship between broadcast TV, painting, and technology's interruptive possibilities can be seen in the work of Hohn's contemporary, the German painter Matthias Groebel, who, in his *Painted Faces* series made throughout the 1990s, evokes television's ability to generate mysticism through ambient imagery. Contrasted with Groebel's interest in the bracketing of vision through media consumption habits, the works at Greene Naftali inspire reverence toward nature, in both its sublimity and its decay. In appropriating Ross, Hohn folds into his appropriation all of the televisually mediated images of Ross: his painting practice, detailed process shots, and closely filmed images of his brush cascading across a canvas, as well as Ross's own appearance, mode of dress, and distinctive voice. They're campy, too, implicit with the marriage of "low" and "high" art. Hohn's landscapes also point to the changing habits of viewing art and painting in a world marked by technologies of recreation. More than two centuries ago, Friedrich Schiller described the artist's changing relationship to nature as a loss: "nature with us has disappeared from humanity and we encounter it again in its truth only outside this, in the inanimate world." [2] Schiller believes that unifying with nature is now an impossibility as humans have delineated a world separate from the natural environment. The democratization of leisure time that resulted from industrialization brought with it ennui and listlessness. This retreat from nature yielded a "contemporary terror of boredom" as literary studies scholar Elizabeth S. Goodstein

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writes, which "is saturated with the post-Romantic resignation to a world in which neither work nor leisure can bring happiness to subjects who no longer hope for divine restitution." [3]

In the exhibition, the "contemporary terror of boredom" comes to its most perplexing manifestation in the eight small feces-like reliefs, their brown plaster resembling sewage and excrement affixed to wooden boards yet hung with a carefulness that is facetious given their content. Hohn's elegant presentation is a sheer veil, exposing the suppressed anxieties of the 1980s regarding HIV / AIDS by public institutions and by the straight consciousness, who submerged its fears through deliberate ignorance, changing the channel when forced to watch millions die throughout the ongoing AIDS crisis. How was this public responsible for a contemporary supposition that art must shun the Real rather than confront it? During the 1980s, the often-invoked "general population" and the United States government under the Reagan regime equated homosexuality with disease. AIDS is "the contemporary moment in a much longer history, the [...] complex interweaving of medicine and morality with surveillance and regulation [...] of sex." [4] Psycho-social fears about anality and homosexuality thus became public policy, as 60 percent of employers by 1989 were forcing pre-employment HIV-testing on potential hires, a practice that in some places still continues today, making them urinate or draw blood to prove their lack of HIV. Lawmakers, both in the States and Germany, also proposed submitting gay people to quarantines. [5] This treatment of sexuality and disease as entwined persists today. Hohn's panels evoke the historical desire of the dominant classes to ignore debility and disease through apparent order. Despite the evident scatological elements in this work, there is also something appealing about it, too, even chocolatey. Hohn questions our instinctive repulsion, and perhaps admires it as a particular aesthetic mode.

Previously unseen works of enamel and varnish on display further edify his intentions. For example, the untitled splatter painting on wood from 1987 is uneasy, gesturing toward painterly tropes with its coagulated swirls of green, white, brown, and cadmium red, which orbit a white semisphere. Glazes and bulbs make these works look like pottery, disguising the wood foundation with assiduous technique. They're notably installed on shelves rather than hung, a framing device that marks a degraded objecthood (apart from the elevated wall-mounted status of painting). Reminiscent of amateur decorative ceramics of the "paint your own pottery" trend that took off in the 1980s, they are also somehow these disagreeable objects, conjuring kitsch inflected by the finesse of Meret Oppenheim – with her uncanny adornment of objects that parody the absence of utility as a betrayal of function.

The exhibition continues the arc of earlier presentations of Hohn's work in its foregrounding of the artist's interest in contemporary hierarchies of aesthetics, encouraging the audience to express doubt in modern painting and culture more broadly. While prior exhibitions at Greenspon and AFA emphasized his interest in degeneracy and abjection with his fecal reliefs and umber abstractions, "No Great Mysteries" at Greene Naftali, with the addition of previously unseen ceramic-like works, is a more banal journey than previous iterations. The title gives into this mission, promising to be so unsurprising and plaintive as to exhaust any contrived attempts at profundity. But Hohn's technical acumen elevates his subjects beyond triteness. Emergent is a dialectic of painting pursuant to a refinement of craft that simultaneously repudiates established notions of taste, resulting in an evocative blend of populist style and genteel sensibility.

Joel Danilewitz works for the *Brooklyn Rail*. He lives in New York.

Image credit: Courtesy of the Estate of Ull Hohn and Galerie Neu, Berlin; photos: Zeshan Ahmed / Greene Naftali, New York

NOTES

- [1] "Ull Hohn: No Great Mysteries," exh. press release, Greene Naftali, www.greenenaftaligallery.com/exhibitions/ull-hohn-no-great-mysteries.
- [2] Friedrich Schiller, "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," in *Essays*, ed. Walter Hinderer, trans. Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Continuum, New York, 1998), 204–7.
- [3] Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 2008.
- [4] Frank Mort, "Introduction," in *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830* (London: Routledge, 2000), 2.
- [5] Mark Kaplan, "AIDS and the Psycho-Social Disciplines: The Social Control of 'Dangerous' Behavior," in "Challenging the Therapeutic State: Critical Perspectives on Psychiatry and the Mental Health System," special issue, *The Journal of Mind and Behavior* 11, no. 3/4 (Summer and Autumn, 1990): 337–351, at 343.

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The Preserving Machine of Matthias Groebel

BY STERRE BARENTSEN · REVIEWS · MARCH 9, 2023



Matthias Groebel, "Lo895" (1995), "Lo793" (1993). Installation view of *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 2022. Photo: Cedric Mussano.



Matthias Groebel, *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, 2022 (installation view). Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo: Cedric Mussano.

In 1980s West Germany, when public-access channels first began streaming into living rooms, Matthias Groebel started building a painting machine to compete with the captivating powers of a pixelated image. His story feels like something out of science fiction. With the help of his self-made machine, Groebel reroutes the faces in his paintings—each with their own depraved, clinical, and sexual undertones—straight from the TV screen to the canvas. At the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf, Groebel’s exhibition *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)* featured his motley cast of portraits. Rooted in the gritty world of cyberpunk, Groebel’s paintings explore both the pixilated, blue-tinged aesthetics and the flood of random and “poor” images that accompanied new media’s rise.

Groebel began making art as an autodidact in the early 1980s. A pharmacist by day, he ferreted through electronic scrapyards in his free time and created his painting machine by modifying a children’s Fischertechnik construction set with airbrush pens, windscreen wipers, and bike chains. The machine moves a robotic airbrush smoothly and systematically, row by row, over a canvas, spraying dots of color onto its surface, resulting in portraits that look as if Georges Seurat were working in a depraved cyberpunk technoscape. The faces in Groebel’s Düsseldorf show included a woman with frizzy blond hair sucking the dirt from under her pinky nail; a smirking man, rendered in sepia-blue tones, a vein protruding from his forehead; and a man wearing a blue, collared shirt and a pig mask. It’s as if a director off-screen is telling these figures never to look at the camera: no one meets our eye.

Toward the end of the eighties, Groebel, who was born in Aachen, appeared in Cologne on the tails of an influx of German artists and gallerists. In 1983 alone, artist Gerhard Richter moved to Cologne, dealer Max Hetzler relocated his gallery there from Stuttgart, and Monika Sprüth opened her first gallery in the city. As the decade progressed, more artists and gallerists arrived, contributing to the unprecedented growth of the local contemporary-art market. When Groebel arrived, his painting machine in hand, he found himself in an art capital that was, at the time, second only to New York City. Groebel, more connected to the computer subculture, was at odds with the gestural abstract painters who were dominating Cologne, but that doesn’t mean his figurative paintings should be considered in isolation from the scene. According to a *New York Times* review of his 2002 solo show

at the UCU gallery in New York, Groebel's work “has a bleak, airless quality that calls to mind Gerhard Richter.” Groebel also had an important predecessor in K. O. Götz, a painter and professor of art at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, who, despite being known for his explosive gestural forms, was also one of the first to experiment with painting electronic images. In a series of grid works from the early 1960s, such as *Density 10: 3: 2: 1* (1961), Götz divided his canvas into thousands of small fields in order to imitate the pixels of a TV screen. While Götz’s initial experiments in media art were rooted in furthering the formal possibilities of abstraction, Groebel, working twenty years later, was operating in a very different media environment. Even if his methods overlapped with his peers and predecessors, his motivations also diverged.

Until the 1980s, the average German TV viewer could choose between a maximum of three state-owned channels. But by the end of the decade, West Germans had access to dozens of channels that played all day and all night, seven days a week. With this expansion, a host of low-budget soap operas and game shows were made to fill up the hours of viewing time. Groebel spent his evenings rummaging through obscure TV channels and odd programs. A new tool that could convert analogue wave signals to pixels became a central component in this painting machine. It allowed him to gather faces from television images and feed them into his painting contraption. The curation of *A Change in Weather* attempted to mimic the lure, entrapment, and repetition of a television box, by inviting viewers to move in front of and behind floating walls installed in the gallery. It felt as if we, too, were hysterically changing channels and filling our retinas with rapidly moving images.

In the exhibition catalogue, cocurator Andreas Selg compares Groebel’s work to “literature, especially sci-fi and cyberpunk stories of invention and reconfiguration.” I would argue that Groebel’s machine finds an especially apt counterpart in science-fiction writer Philip K. Dick’s 1969 short story “The Preserving Machine.” Its protagonist, Doc Labyrinth, worries about the fate of culture in the case of an apocalypse, so he builds a machine that turns classical compositions into animals. He releases the slender Mozart bird, the silly Schubert sheep, and the round Bach bugs into nature, only to discover that, with time, their bodies metamorphosize to grow claws and stingers. Likewise, Groebel gathers bits of media culture into a machine only to later find them deformed. His 1993 portrait *L0593* shows a woman against a light-blue background dolefully gazing into the distance. It is an

image we have seen before. It recalls a familiar cinematic trope: Camera A zooms in. A beautiful woman watches her lover depart. She realizes maybe she does love him; she understands it is already too late. But we don't recognize this woman in Groebel's painting. She is an actress, but not a celebrity. Her hair is flat, her fringe badly cut, and she has eye bags made worse by an unflattering light that casts large shadows on her face. She is the degenerate, soap-opera version of the big-screen love story.



Matthias Groebel, *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, 2022
(installation view). Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo:
Cedric Mussano.



Matthias Groebel, *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, 2022
(installation view). Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Photo:
Cedric Mussano.

Groebel is attracted to the simultaneous interplay of voyeurism and fantasy that takes place on the TV screen. The words *PRIVATE PLACE* are inserted into the painting *L0793*, which depicts a man lying down. Captured from below, his foreshortened face consists mostly of chin, nostrils, and brow bone. Is it a sex scene? Is he even alive? It is hard to tell from his wide-open eyes that are frozen in place as they look to the ceiling. The sexual undertones of many of Groebel's paintings enhance a feeling of an inappropriate, or even perverse, voyeurism. These forbidden glimpses are broken by the often nonsensical text that Groebel includes in many of his paintings. Phrases like *Tour Guide* and *Spied for China* offer small snippets of a story line. Although these faces belong to "real" people, by cropping and grouping them together the artist conjures a new world existing on the fringes of our own.

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that Groebel—who has been painting for over thirty years in relative obscurity—had his first institutional show in 2023, after a string of recent gallery solo shows in Zurich, Cologne, and Berlin. With the rise of apps like TikTok, algorithms have developed an unmatched ability to pull us down the rabbit hole and into a stream of

anonymous faces that we swipe through in endless, one-second cycles. Where do all of these faces go after the algorithm has abandoned them? What does this massive data junkyard on the periphery of the internet look like? Matthias Groebel's portraits of people from the outskirts of mainstream television foreshadowed a complex media landscape of strange digital niches that have utopian potential but dystopian ramifications, where outcasts and strays find themselves and each other.

By Sterre Barentsen

Sterre Barentsen (b. 1997) is an art historian and curator. She is a PhD candidate at the Humboldt University in Berlin where she is working on an environmental art history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). She holds degrees in Art History from the Courtauld Institute of Art and Oxford University. She is an assistant curator at the Barberini Museum in Potsdam, and she co-curated the VII Moscow International Biennale of Young Art.

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Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid, *Dissident Histories*. Exhibition view at Loža Gallery, Koper, 2022–23.
Photo: Jaka Jeraša / Obalne Galerije Piran, 2023.

visiting the show and stayed with me in the following days, reassembling and expanding in its meanings. Entanglement as being tangled up and entrapped, as interconnecting and interweaving, as involvement and bond.

The broad selection of works presented in the show—including videos, posters, texts, installations, and a slide show—results from a long-standing artistic partnership involving Gržinić and Šmid since the early 1980s. At the intersection of art practice and activism, their collaboration has been devoted to exploring the political potential of experimental video against dominant systems of subjugation.

Conceived as a reactivation of their work, rather than a retrospective, the exhibition and many of the included projects serve as a zone of connection between struggles in different times and places, from Dada actions against the rise of Nazism in the 1920s up to present forms of opposition to financialized capitalism. The video *Three Sisters*—one of the earlier works presented in the show, dating back to 1992—constitutes an example. Laid on the background of a transposition of Anton Chekhov's play, the juxtaposition of various elements—documentary and film footage, historical postcards, the reenactment of advertisements and fictional characters—creates a short circuit of solidarity in relation to different crises, like the fall of communism, the

war in Croatia, anti-Semitic persecutions, or the AIDS pandemic in Africa in the 1980s.

The practice of Gržinić and Šmid is driven by a decolonial perspective firmly grounded in theory. Arguments by thinkers such as Alain Badiou, Jonathan Beller, and Achille Mbembe are summoned, for instance, in the video *Naked Freedom* (2010) to state that crises are not separate events, but rather part of one single major event called capitalism. Here, as in the whole exhibition, entanglement takes on the meaning of recognizing the interconnectedness of wars, conflicts, and other forms of subjugation happening all around the world, and making common cause against politics that ensnare subjectivities on a planetary scale. However, taking on a decolonial perspective does not mean adopting a generalized point of view. Gržinić and Šmid are strongly committed to analyzing their cultural background and its history: in the videos *Bilocation* (1990) and *Labyrinth* (1993) they address the dissolution of Yugoslavia and its violent implications, the video performance *HI-RES* (2006) centers on the catastrophic consequences of turbo-capitalism in Eastern Europe, and *Relations / 25 Years of the Lesbian Group ŠKUC-LL* (2012) is a video focusing on the feminist lesbian scene in Slovenia. Yet, the artists further develop their analyses in relation to other contexts and experiences, creating an entanglement of critical positions that nurture and support one another. This kind of interconnectedness is reinforced at the exhibition level, where images and words



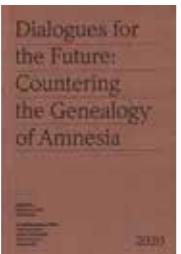
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With contributions by the editors and Marco Deseris, Tjaša Kancler, Giuseppe Marano Tanja Velagić, Ana Vujanović (eng./slo./ita.).

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Pustovšek, Sophie Uitz,
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travel from one work to another, activating connections and mutual amplification of meanings.

A peculiar entanglement also occurs between the documentary genre and fiction. Since the visual has become a fundamental component in the neoliberal management of truth, the artists recognize the need for counterstrategies and devise what they term “a new logic of performativity.” Choreographed in their videos are images, texts, and performing bodies in active and unexpected relationships, aimed at summoning affects, consciousness, and action toward political issues instead of representing them. The use of fiction—as highlighted in *Obsession* (2008)—activates theory as a world-making force, its first aim being to dismantle prevailing discourses that naturalize racism, inequality, and dispossession as accidental effects of democracy and global growth.

Entering into the visual and conceptual density of *Dissident Histories* can be challenging, as dealing with complexity and criticality always is, but how can we unravel the intricacy of our ensnarement if not by practicing entanglement ourselves?

Francesca Lazzarini is a curator and PhD researcher in the Advanced Practices program at the Visual Cultures Department of Goldsmiths, London (GB).

Günther Selichar: Schirmherrschaft

Museum der Moderne Salzburg,
26. 11. 2022 – 12. 3. 2023

Kunstsammlung Gera – Orangerie, 6. 4. –
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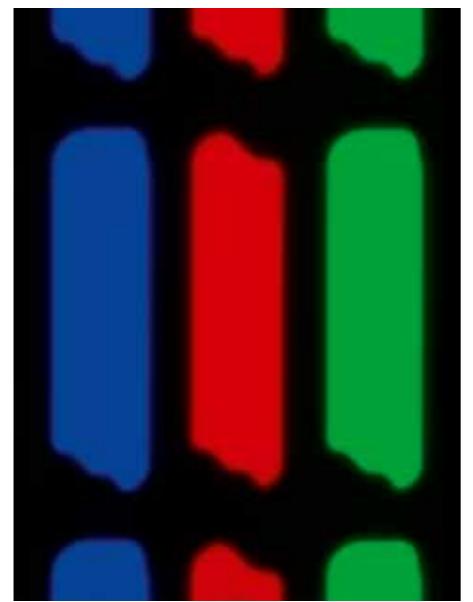
von Jakob Thaller

Als Kind, als ganz kleines Kind, habe ich mich einmal – entgegen aller Warnung von erwachsener Seite (»Setz dich nicht so nah vor den Fernseher, du bekommst noch viereckige Augen!«) – herangetraut, unmittelbar an den Bildschirm. So nah, dass ich die einzelnen Pixel erkannt habe. Zum ersten Mal habe ich verstanden, dass das gar keine kleinen Menschen sind, die uns in einer Röhre Theater vorspielen. Auf der Bildschirmoberfläche sind Farben – Blau, Rot und Grün –, deren visuelle Autorität so gewaltig ist, dass man aus ihnen alles entstehen lassen kann. *Who's Afraid of Blue, Red and Green? – Super Panavision 70* (2020–2022) lautet nicht nur der Titel – ein Titel, den Günther Selichar schon öfters verwendet hat, eine Anspielung auf Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue* (1966) – der pulverbeschichteten Lochpaneele an der Glasfassade des Museums der Moderne Salzburg, sondern auch die Frage, die sich seit Jahrzehnten durch sein Werk zieht. Selichar analysiert »die Wechselwirkungen zwischen medialer Maschine und Mensch« (Pressetext), die Faszination, vielmehr noch die Macht, die der Fernseher auf mich als Kind ausgeübt hat, sodass ich wie in Trance auf ihn zugehen musste und seinen Bann stundenlang nicht verlassen wollte. Mittlerweile ist dieses Zeitalter der *Schirmherrschaft*, beschleunigt durch die Digitalisierung, längst in jeden Lebensbereich eingedrungen – wie sehr müssen wir uns wirklich davor fürchten?

Bereits in seiner frühen Arbeit *Suchbild. Find the difference* (1993–1994) beschäftigt sich Selichar mit der Bildmanipulation; zwei idyllische Landschaftsaufnahmen werden großformatig gegenübergestellt, wobei eine davon digital verändert wurde und sich dadurch Fragen zur Rezeption von Kunst und Natur stellen. Grundsätz-

lich ist die Manipulation von Aufnahmen so alt, wie die Fotografie selbst. Vielleicht ist sie sogar ein essenzieller Bestandteil ihres Wesens. Durch die Möglichkeiten moderner, digitaler Bildbearbeitungsprogramme hat sich die mediale Vervielfältigung, vor allem aber auch der damit einhergehende gesellschaftliche Einfluss – und die Nutzung zum politischen Missbrauch – um ein Vielfaches erhöht. Können wir den Unterschied zwischen Realen und Narrativ in der massenmedialen Kommunikation überhaupt noch erkennen, oder ist er mittlerweile irrelevant geworden?

Günther Selichar fragt in seiner Arbeit *The Double You Series* (19.5.9) (2021–2022) nach dem »Who?«, »What?«, »Where?«, »When?«



Günther Selichar, # 2, aus der 5-teiligen Serie:
Cul-de-sac (4:3), 2019–2022. Inkjet-Direktdruck
auf Acrylglas. Courtesy: Sammlung SpallArt,
Salzburg. Copyright: der Künstler und Bildrecht,
Wien 2022. Foto: der Künstler.

und »Why?«. Diese journalistischen Grundfragen, die laut Lehrbuch bei jeder Recherche bedacht und gut sichtbar am Anfang beantwortet werden sollten, liegen bei Selichar im (teilweise) Verborgenen. Man muss die im Hochformat installierten, an das Format eines Handyscreens erinnernden Werke im richtigen Winkel und aus einer bestimmten Entfernung betrachten, damit die Textebene aus der rot-grün-blauen Oberfläche hervortritt. Der Effekt stellt sich aber auch ein, wenn man sich auf die massenmediale Metabene begibt und die Arbeit durch die Smart-

Günther Selichar: The
Double You Series.
Hrsg. von Museum der
Moderne Salzburg in
Kooperation mit der Kunstsammlung Gera.

Günther Selichar: The
Double You Series
Günther Selichar

VfmK – Verlag für moderne Kunst, Wien
2022 (eng.).
292 Seiten, 16,6 × 32,3 cm, zahlreiche SW-
und Farabbildungen.
€ 30,- / ISBN 978-3-903439-76-4

phone-Kamera am Handydisplay – dem Fenster, durch das viele Menschen einen Großteil der Welt mittlerweile wahrnehmen – betrachtet. »Wir sind so eingewickelt in massenmediale Hölle, dass sie uns häufig die Durchsicht auf die Welt erschweren.«¹ Dass diese erhöhte Bildschirmzeit mit einer Vielzahl von Gesundheitsschäden psychischer und physischer Natur einhergeht, erinnert an die Möglichkeit, den Bildschirm auch manchmal auszuschalten.

Wie Bilder in ihrer Abwesenheit funktionieren, untersucht Selichar in seiner Serie *Screens, cold* (1997–2003), die er in *Standby* (2003–2004) weiterentwickelt. Die Ästhetik des Abgeschalteten wird visualisiert, indem er einen Röhrenfernseher mit einer thermografischen Infrarotkamera wiederholt im Stand-by-Modus fotografiert hat. Die Kamera und deren vom Künstler festgelegter Temperaturbereich bestimmen, was wir erkennen, dadurch werden abstrakte Farbkombinationen sichtbar, die sonst im Verborgenen bleiben.² Man wird an das erinnert, was Andrei Tarkowski einmal gesagt haben soll: »Wir schauen nur, aber wir sehen nicht.«

1 Günther Selichar, *Nächtliches Realitätenbüro (revisited)*, Graz: Edition Camera Austria 2022, S. 110.

2 Vgl. Amy Schlegel, I: Günther Selichar – Media Machines, Medford/Boston: Tufts University Art Gallery/Aidekman Arts Center 2006, <https://selichar.net/standby/>.

Jakob Thaller arbeitet seit März 2022 für Camera Austria International. Er lebt in Graz (AT).

Transformationen der Malerei

Matthias Groebel: A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)

Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf, 10. 12. 2022 – 26. 2. 2023

von Christina Irrgang

Wer in den späten 1980er-Jahren den Fernseher einschaltete, der über eine der neuen TV-Sat-Anlagen vielzählige Programme via Satellitenschüssel empfing, konnte im Zuge eines Wetterwechsels Bildstörungen wahrnehmen: Der sinnbildliche Schnee auf der Mattscheibe, der sich über die ausgestrahlten Bilder legte, ließ in der Unterbrechung von Sichtbarkeit eine neuartige Bildhaftigkeit aufscheinen. Diese war flüssiger, bunter, internationaler, in ihren (visuellen) Narrativen unbegrenzter und aufgrund des umfassenden Senderaums mitunter reines Material, das die Apparate an 24 Stunden zwischen Tag und Nacht mit einem Bildvolumen füllte, das sich mittels VHS-Rekorder auch zum Wiederaussehen aufzeichnen ließ.

Aus solch flackernder Bilderflut, die der Mediendephilosoph Vilém Flusser (1920–1991) im Jahr 1985 als »Universum technischer Bilder« beschrieb,¹ hat der Künstler Matthias Groebel (geb. 1958) 1989 einen Werkkomplex begonnen, der durch die Mittel der Malerei dieser sich verändernden Bildhaftigkeit eine damals zeitgenössische Verortung gab und der heute ihre historische Dimension und ihr Nachwirken umso deutlicher vor Augen führt. Es ist erstaunlich, dass die im Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen Düsseldorf eingerichtete Ausstellung *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)* erstmals umfassend Matthias Groebels auf Fernsehbildern basierende Malereien vorstellt, wirken sie durch die direkte Sichtbarkeit der Dekonstruktion der ihnen inhärenten Medientechniken doch so, als seien sie fester Bestandteil des Kanons der Medienkunst und -wissenschaft.

Punkt um Punkt treten Groebels Bildmotive aus hell und dunkel gesetzten Farbfeldern auf grunderneuerter Leinwand hervor, leuchten in Zitronengelb, Pink oder hellem Blau, verdichten sich mit zunehmender Distanz zu der immer im Quadrat ausgeführten Malerei und bilden eine inci-



Matthias Groebel, *A Change in Weather* (Broadcast Material 1989–2001). Ausstellungsansicht im Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2022–2023. Foto: Cedric Mussano.

nander verwobene, verpixelte und vibrierende Fläche. Im Angesicht menschlicher Köpfe mit starker Gestik und Mimik, die ihren Kontexten entzogen sind und die den sich entfaltenden Bildraum zwischen Nah- und Fernsicht einnehmen, wird deutlich, dass diese außergewöhnlichen Malereien mit einer technischen Apparatur ausgeführt worden sind – die Matthias Groebel selbst entwickelt hat. Groebel, der Mitte der 1980er-Jahre als Autodidakt begann, abstrakte Bilder zu malen, konzipierte und programmierte ausgehend vom aufkommenden (privaten) Satelliten-TV eine Malmaschine, die den Zugriff auf (aufgezeichnete) Fernsehbilder und den Transfer ihrer technischen Information mittels Airbrush-Pistole auf die Leinwand ermöglicht. Er orientierte sich hierbei an Handlungsabfolgen, die er als Maler vollzog, und transformierte auch die Malerei vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen technischen Entwicklungen: Die Maschine folgt in ihrem Ablauf einerseits dem eines klassischen Bildaufbaus, »schießt« mit einer Acrylfarbe nach der nächsten, die Groebel manuell einfüllt; und steht andererseits in Rückkopplung zum digitalen Bild, das als reproduzierter Bildausschnitt aus Serien, Filmen oder Reportagen gespeist wird.



Matthias Groebel:
Painted Faces.
Broadcast Material
1989–2006.

Mit Textbeiträgen von Sadie Plant, Andreas Selg (eng.).
Edition Patrick Frey, Zürich 2022.
240 Seiten, 20 × 30 cm, 150 SW- und Farbbildungen.
€ 48,- / ISBN 978-3-907236-40-6

Ähnlich dem Vorgang des unkontrollierten Medienkonsums, durch den sich Bilder in der Erinnerung überlagern, hat der Künstler das von ihm mit VHS-Rekorder aufgezeichnete Material als Standbilder wie auch als assoziative Erinnerungsbilder ausgewertet, indem er nachträglich mit Überblendungen oder Bildtexten aus archivierten Textsammlungen arbeite. Groebels Bildkörpern wird mit einer überzeugenden kuratorischen Setzung durch Kathrin Bentele und Andreas Selg Resonanz gegeben: An hintereinander gestaffelten Wänden, die in rechteckigem Format in den Kunstverein eingezogen wurden, hängen die Bilder rasterartig gruppiert und generieren über ihr singuläres Erzählen hinaus auch in Zusammenschlüssen Atmosphären zwischenmenschlicher Interaktion. Die Rückseite einer jeden Bildwand ist frei, lässt im situativen Umdrehen oder beim Verlassen der Ausstellung blanke Flächen für Projektion und Reflexion. Die Präsenz von Matthias Groebels Bildern ver gegenwärtigt dabei, dass Malerei ihre eigenen Zeitdimensionen überschreiten kann.

¹ Vilém Flusser, *Ins Universum der technischen Bilder*, Göttingen: European Photography 1985.

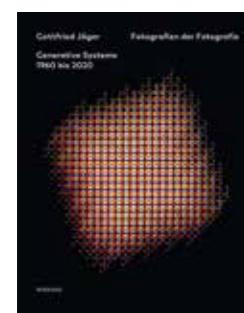
Christina Irrgang (geb. 1983) ist promovierte Kunsthistorikerin und Medienwissenschaftlerin und publiziert als freiberufliche Autorin Texte zur zeitgenössischen Kunst.

Gottfried Jäger: Photographs of Photography. Generative Systems from 1960 to 2020

Sprengel Museum Hannover, 8. 2. – 23. 4. 2023

by Steven Humblet

Enthralled by breakthroughs in information theory and computing models, several photographers in the decade between 1960 and 1970 started to use these insights to explore untapped possibilities of the photographic medium. One of the main proponents of this newfangled approach was the German photographer Gottfried Jäger (born 1937), who as a teacher of photographic techniques at the Werkkunstschule Bielefeld developed his "generative photography." Although the term was coined by him, it was not limited to his own practice but also com-



Gottfried Jäger:
Photographs of
Photography. Ge-
nerative Systems
from 1960 to 2020.
Ed. by Stefan
Gronert for
Sprengel Museum
Hannover in co-
operation with the
Museum im Kul-
turspeicher Würz-
burg.

With a foreword by Luisa Heese and Reinhard Spieler and with contributions by the editor and Henrike Holsing, Kathrin Schönegg, Gudrun Wessing (ger./eng.). Wienand Verlag, Cologne 2023. 188 pages, 24.6 x 30.6 cm, numerous b/w and color illustrations. € 30.– / ISBN 978-3868327519



Gottfried Jäger, zwischen, durch (between, through), 1986. Gelatin silver object XI (Version 8) cut in, mounted, distance frame, 50 x 50 cm. Courtesy: Sprengel Museum Hannover. Photo: Herling/Gwose and Sprengel Museum Hannover.

which were created by subjecting the same motif (a crack in an enamel developer bath or a piece of rust, for instance) to a series of different photographic manipulations: multiple exposures, dislocations, enlargements, et cetera. The photographic exhaustion of a singular motif already reveals a formal strategy that was paramount in his later work: an alternation of repetition and variation. This would become the hallmark of his most-known series, shown in the second room, the *Lochblendenstrukturen* (Pinhole Structures). These images are created by exchanging the lens of a regular large-format camera with two separate pinhole apertures containing fifty small holes. These tiny holes could take on different forms: from points to circles and lines. By playing with the possible combinations between these two lenses, turning them left or right, or adjusting the space between them, the photographer could then produce ever-shifting intricate light patterns of lines, dots, circles, and semicircles. The possibilities were endless. This, of course, led to a problem: How to make sure that this playfulness would not end in random images? Jäger found a solution in devising and following a strict protocol that defined the possible interactions between apparatus and apertures beforehand. For this protocol, he listed several parameters of the photographic apparatus he was engaging with, so he could rigorously and systematically chart each possible combination. Only by binding himself to this rational, methodical working method would the images become meaningful: each iteration was the result of

prised the work of several others who were operating in a similar vein (some photographs by his peers are presented on the outer wall of the exhibition). The term itself can be loosely understood as a type of photography that uses the basic parameters of the photographic apparatus to create self-generated images: photographs of photography itself, as it were. Limiting themselves to the basic material of photography (light) and the several optical and chemical operations to which that light could be subjected, Jäger and the other experimental practitioners of "generative photography" set out to create a factual (and seemingly rational) language of photography.

The large overview exhibition dedicated to Jäger's oeuvre at the Sprengel Museum gives the contemporary public insight into his specific implementation of "generative photography." The first room is dedicated to his earliest works,

In the darkroom, the strict program of the previous series was exchanged for a looser engagement with the photographic printing process, mainly focusing on the material conditions of the printed image by treating it as an object in its own right. He again opted for very simple gestures, like folding and turning the papers or overlaying them in stacks, in order to show the possible manipulations that this material allows. Subsequent photographs shown in this room question the role of the border of the photographic paper as an element of framing. The experiments in the darkroom allowed Jäger to also explore the conceptual gap between an object and its photographic representation. This is for instance beautifully addressed in one particular series of three "image-objects" (*Three Squares*, 1983). In this series we encounter a square photogram, then a cutout of said photogram pinned against a white background, followed finally by a photographic reproduction of the second image. Reading them in this order, the viewer becomes quickly aware that all three function as object and image at the same time.

It is in this last piece that we can sense the enduring relevance of Jäger's work for a current generation of photographers who are questioning and experimenting with the materiality of the photographic image. By prying photography away from the assumption that it was inevitably defined by its indexical relationship to the world, Jäger stressed the autonomy of photography as a tool for the imaginary construction of a self-sustained image world. And he subsequently made the viewer aware that a photograph is never a simple transparent see-through image, but always a mediated view defined by the program of the photographic apparatus.

Steven Humblet lives and works in Brussels (BE). He is an art critic, researcher, and curator, specialized in photography. He is head of the research group Thinking Tools at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp (BE).

**Susanne Altmann, Katalin Krasznahorkai,
Christin Müller, Franziska Schmidt,
Sonia Voss (Hg.), Hosen haben Röcke an.
Künstlerinnengruppe Erfurt 1984–1994**

Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2023

**Gabriele Stötzer, Der lange Arm der Stasi.
Die Kunstszenen der 1960er, 1970er und
1980er Jahre in Erfurt**

Spector Books, Leipzig 2022

von Peter Kunitzky

Es dürfte wohl nicht nur dem reinen Zufall geschuldet sein, dass die Wiederentdeckung der Künstlerinnengruppe Erfurt just in eine Zeit fällt, in der das Kollektive so auffällig hochgehalten wird; in der die Anrufung des Gemeinsinns und die Beschwörung der Solidarität ein Wirgefühl entfachen sollen, das – unter den verschärften Bedingungen einer Pandemie – die Atomisierungstendenzen eines mit der neoliberalen Ideologie einhergehenden normativen Individualismus nicht nur im Ganzen der Gesellschaft, sondern auch im Subsystem Kunst einzuhegen hätte. Dass die momentane Konjunktur der Kollektivität in der Kunst keine Singularität vorstellt, sondern sich in eine diesbezüglich durchaus traditionsreiche Geschichte einreihet, belegt aber auch schon die Gründung der Künstlerinnengruppe. Denn ab dem Ende der 1970er-Jahre – genauer: nach der im Herbst 1976 erfolgten Ausbürgerung des Liedermachers und Dichters Wolf Biermann, die in Ost- wie Westdeutschland damals auf großes Befremden, ja erheblichen Protest stieß – entschieden sich die Künstler*innen- und Intellektuellenkreise der DDR für eine radikal neue Form der Dissidenz, die sich darin äußerte, dass man – was in den sozialistischen »Bruderländern« allerdings schon lange Gepflogenheit war – am Regime, weil sein Utopismus jetzt als hinfällig galt, keine konstruktive Kritik



**Hosen haben Röcke an.
Künstlerinnengruppe
Erfurt 1984–1994.**
Hrsg. von Susanne
Altmann, Katalin
Krasznahorkai, Christin
Müller, Franziska
Schmidt, Sonia Voss.

Anlässlich der gleichnamigen Ausstellung,
nGbK – neue Gesellschaft für bildende
Kunst, Berlin, 27.11.2021 – 30.1.2022.
Mit Textbeiträgen der Herausgeberinnen
(ger./eng.).

Mit Arbeiten von Monika Andres, Tely
Büchner, Elke Carl, Monique Förster,
Gabriele Göbel u.a.
Hatje Cantz, Berlin 2023.
256 Seiten, 19,5 x 26,5 cm, 200 SW- und
Farabbildungen.

€ 38,- / ISBN 978-3-7757-5258-9 (Hatje
Cantz)
€ 38,- / ISBN 978-3-938515-92-1 (nGbK)

mehr übte, sondern es stattdessen dezidiert infrage stellte. Überdies, und das ist für unsere Be lange ausschlaggebend, wurde diese Staatsferne auch nicht mehr solitär vertreten, da man von nun an in ein Netz eingebunden war, das es erlaubte, mit den anderen Oppositionellen einen regen und systematischen Austausch zu pflegen, der der Koordination des Widerstands dienen sollte. Ein Unterfangen, das in einem so zentralistisch organisierten Gemeinwesen wie der DDR mit einem nur rudimentär ausgeprägten

von staatlichen Regularien führte nun dazu, dass nicht wenige Proponent*innen der Szene sich entschlossen dem Schmalfilm zuwandten, um ihn ihrem interdisziplinären Ansatz, der geradezu als Kennzeichen dieses Kreises gelten darf, dienstbar zu machen; so war es etwa auch A.R. Penck, der ab Mitte der 1970er-Jahre als erster der staatsfernen ostdeutschen Maler zur 8-mm-Kamera griff, um mit ihrer Hilfe die Zweidimensionalität des Tafelbilds zu durchbrechen: ein Beispiel, das Schule machte.



Hosen haben Röcke an. Künstlerinnengruppe Erfurt 1984–1994. Ausstellungsansicht in der nGbK – neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst, Berlin 2021–2022. Courtesy: nGbK, Berlin. Foto: Andreas Langfeld.

Fernsprech- und Verkehrsnetz sowie einer Post, der aus begreiflichen Gründen nicht zu trauen war, kein leichtes war. Da war namentlich Findigkeit gefragt.

Und findig war Gabriele Stötzer (vorm. Kachold) allemal, sie, die auf vielfältige Weise in der Erfurter Alternativkultur verankert war und im Zuge dessen auch die Gründung der Künstlerinnengruppe im Jahr 1984 initiierte, indem sie einen Kreis von gleichgesinnten Mitstreiterinnen um sich scharte, der – mit immer wieder wechselnder Besetzung – etwa einen Kern von 15 Frauen umfasste. Was da zunächst als Gesprächsrunde über anthroposophische und feministische Literatur, esoterisches Wissen oder sexuelle Themen begann, in deren Rahmen Empfindungen, Verletzlichkeiten und Identitätsfragen verhandelt wurden, nahm aber bald eine Wendung ins Praktische, denn letztlich war es doch die kollektive künstlerische Ausdrucks kraft, die den Fluchtpunkt allen Redens bildete. Nachdem man sich dabei anfangs noch in der Malerei und Fotografie versucht hatte, richtete man seine Aufmerksamkeit ab 1986 besonders auf das Bewegtbild, das heißt konkret auf den 8-mm-Film, weil man sich von diesem Medium ein größeres körperliches und seelisches Ausdrucksspektrum versprach; ein Medium übrigens, das in der subkulturellen Szene der 1980er-Jahre durchaus hoch im Kurs stand, da sich die (sowjetische oder landeseigene) Technik, ganz im Gegensatz zum Video, erstens als erschwinglich erwies und sich die offizielle DDR-Kultur politik – und mithin die Stasi – zweitens darum überhaupt nicht bekümmerte, denn der 8-mm-Film fiel für sie nicht unter Kunst. Diese Freiheit

und zu nämlichen Adept*innen gehörten eben auch die Autodidakinnen – tatsächlich besuchte keine Einzige von ihnen eine Kunstabakademie – der Künstlerinnengruppe Erfurt, die zwischen 1986 und 1990 fünf experimentelle Super-8-Filme schufen, anhand derer nicht nur die Struktur der Retrospektive aufgefächert wurde, die die Berliner nGbK vor ungefähr einem Jahr ausrichtete, sondern auch die des nun zu diesem Anlass – etwas verspätet – erscheinenden Katalogs, der zudem noch, notabene von einem Kuratorinnenkollektiv, um Exkurse zu Themen wie die ostdeutsche Frauenbewegung oder die dortige Performance-Kunst ergänzt wurde. Und eben jene Untersuchungsgegenstände weisen wirklich einen Weg in das Herz dieser Arbeiten, die der Weiblichkeit, das heißt ihrer Repräsentation und Identität in performativen Prozessen auf den Grund gehen möchten und dabei gezielt den marginalisierten weiblichen Körper zu ihrem Hauptmotiv erheben; Arbeiten, die den staatlichen Reglementierungen, gesellschaftlichen Normen sowie stereotypen Genderkategorien zuwiderlaufen und eine eigene Körper- und Bildsprache entwickeln. Kurzum: Arbeiten, die der weiblichen Selbstbestimmung aufhelfen wollen.

Denn um diese war es in der ostdeutschen Wirklichkeit weit weniger gut bestellt, als die offiziell verkündete Gleichrangigkeit der Geschlechter hätte vermuten lassen. An den Frauen interessierte den Staatssozialismus nämlich nicht zuletzt vor allem ihre Produktivkraft, die es auszubeuten galt, um eines frohen Tages das

Ausstellung im Düsseldorfer Kunstverein

Zwischen Albtraum und Voyeurismus

Die Kunst des Autodidakten Matthias Groebel liegt an der Schnittstelle von Malerei und Medienkunst. Sie entwickelt den Sog des alten Privat-TV.



Matthias Groebel, „A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)“

Foto: Cedric Mussano

Eine junge blonde Frau starrt ins Nichts und kaut selbstvergessen am kleinen Finger ihrer rechten Hand. Ein Mann trägt eine karnevalistische Schweinsmaske, ein muskulöser Mann im weißen T-Shirt eine giftgrüne Maske, die dem Sport dient oder auch dem Fetisch. Ein Mann mit weichem Gesicht und strähnig schwarz gefärbtem Haar schaut aus dick mit Kajal umrahmten Augen auffordernd aus dem Bild heraus, ein grobkörniger Bildausschnitt zeigt eine Frau mit geschlossenen Augen auf dem Rücken liegend, den Mund leicht geöffnet, dahinter schemenhaft der nackte Oberkörper eines Mannes. Eine Sexszene?

Im immer gleichen quadratischen Format 95 mal 95 Zentimeter reiht Matthias Groebel im Düsseldorfer Kunstverein irritierende, zugleich bekannt und fremd anmutende Acrylbilder zu kleineren und größeren Arrangements. Zusammenhängende Geschichten erzählen sie nicht. Jedes Bild präpariert einen scheinbar zufällig gewählten Moment heraus, allein im Kopf der Betrachtenden fügen sie sich eher zu einer Ahnung als zu einer Geschichte zusammen.

In seiner Ausstellung „A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)“ zeigt Groebel **überwiegend Porträts, die aus größeren Bildern herausgeschnitten scheinen**. Die anonymen Protagonisten stammen aus der Hochphase des analogen TV, als sich die Privatkanäle vermehrten und in rauen Mengen Reality- und Trash-Formate produzierten.

Matthias Groebel ist im Hauptberuf Apotheker und als Künstler Autodidakt. Nach ersten Versuchen in der abstrakten Malerei verlor er das Interesse daran, wollte aber auch mit den damals aktiven Jungen Wilden sich nicht anfreunden. Und er erfand – inspiriert ausgerechnet von einer Konstruktion der Spielzeugfirma Fischertechnik – in den 1980er Jahren eine neue Druckmethode, mit der er erstmals Stills von Fernsehbildern direkt auf die Leinwand bringen konnte; rund zehn Jahre, bevor die ersten Plotter auf den Markt kamen. Die Fernseh-Wellensignale übersetzte er in digitale Pixel und übertrug diese per Airbrush in langen, wiederholten und präzis gesteuerten Arbeitsgängen auf die Leinwand.

Flirrende Bilder

Auf diese Weise entstehen flirrend lebendige Bilder, die im kollektiven Gedächtnis der älteren Semester jenes bläuliche Flimmern des Röhrenfernsehers wieder aufrufen, das eine völlig andere, porösere Qualität hatte als heutige Digitalbilder. Groebels Leinwanddrucke übernehmen das Material der Fernsehbilder dabei nicht rein mechanisch und eins zu eins, er entscheidet über Bildausschnitte, Wahl der Farben, Intensität und Dichte des Auftrags, stellt damit die eigene Manipulation des in sich schon manipulativen Mediums Fernsehen zur Diskussion. Das macht seine Bilder unwirklicher und surrealer als das Ausgangsmaterial.

Kultur / Künste

23.1.2023, 15:21 Uhr

REGINE MÜLLER

Autor*in

THEMEN

#Ausstellung, #Malerei, #Medienkunst, #Medienkritik, #Privatfernsehen

Die so virtuos bearbeiteten und zugleich roh wirkenden Bilder liegen an einer Schnittstelle von Malerei und Medienkunst. Und sie weisen weit darüber hinaus. Denn sie reflektieren nicht nur die düsteren Seiten, ja, das Unbewusste des alten Mediums Fernsehen, sondern greifen voraus auf die milliardenfach angeschwollene Flut privater und öffentlich gemachter Bilder der Beobachtung und Selbstdistanzierung auf den heute noch viel präsenteren, vielfältigeren Bild-Kanälen von Internet, Pay-TV und der Streaming-Dienste.

Groebel denkt auch sehr grundsätzlich über das uralte Medium der Malerei nach, darüber, was das Auge der Betrachtenden aus optischen Informationen macht. „Sehen ist denken“ schreibt der abstrakte Maler Jerry Zeniuk und stellt damit die „Arbeit“ des Auges und des Bewusstseins dar, aus optischen Informationen wie Kontur und Farbe Bilder zu „errechnen“.

Was sowohl für die Täuschung des alten Kinos (stark beschleunigt ablaufende Standbilder simulieren Bewegung) als auch für die flimmernden Signale des Röhrenfernsehers sowie für Groebels Bilder gilt, bei denen das Auge die Signal-Löcher und Leerstellen auf der Leinwand bereitwillig „füllt“. (Ganz anders als bei heutigen digitalen Bildern, die bei schlechter Verbindung zu groben Pixeln zerbröseln, sonst aber ungleich kompakter sind.)

DIE AUSSTELLUNG

Matthias Groebel: „A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)“, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf. Bis zum 26. Februar

Groebels monströser Apparat ist in der Schau nicht zu sehen, nur seine stets quadratischen Leinwände. Auf ihnen wirken die beim Druckverfahren und seiner Nachbearbeitung noch verstärkte Unschärfe der TV-Bilder abstrahierend und zugleich intensivierend.

Die oft mehrdeutigen, unklaren, aber meist intimen Momente, in denen selbstvergessene Menschen von der Fernsehkamera festgehalten wurden, entwickeln auf Groebels Reproduktionen eine sogartige Faszination. Es entsteht ein Gefühl von beruhigender Zufälligkeit des großen medialen Rauschens. Aber auch ein raunender **David-Lynch-Effekt** zwischen surrealem Albtraum und Voyeurismus.



Absurde und gepeinigte Gestalten: Ausstellungsansicht »A Change in Weather« Foto: Cedric Mussano

Die Handschrift der Maschine

Matthias Groebels Maschinenmalerei erzählt von anderen medialen Zeiten – jetzt ist sie erstmals in einer institutionellen Einzelschau zu sehen

Es ist ein seltsames Gefühl, das einen befällt, wenn man vor den Bildern des Kölner Malers Matthias Groebel steht. Vielleicht trifft es der Begriff »Befremden« ganz gut. Die Figuren, die aus den 95 × 95 cm großen Leinwänden rausschauen, wirken abwechselnd skurril, gespenstisch, gemartet oder bedrohlich. In seinen besten Arbeiten kommen diese Qualitäten alle zusammen. Dann etwa, wenn eine Frau, vermutlich in ihren Zwanzigern, scheinbar verängstigt an den Betrachter*innen vorbei blickt. Sie wirkt zugleich unmenschlich, wie ein Klon oder eine ähnliche Instanz, eine Fantasie – eine Fantasie des Fernsehens, um genau zu sein. Das verbindet sie mit allen Bildinhalten der Ausstellung, die derzeit im Düsseldorfer Kunstverein unter dem Namen »A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001)« zu sehen ist. Diese ist unterdessen Groebels erste institutionelle Einzelschau.

Dabei begann der 1958 in Aachen geborene Groebel bereits in den 80er Jahren mit der Kunst, die er neben seinem Studium als Pharmazeut betrieb. Als Autodidakt wandte er sich erst Collagen, dann vor allen Dingen der abstrakten Malerei zu. Nach dem Hochschulabschluss sollte er fortan im Hauptberuf Künstler sein, finanziert durch eine Arbeit als Pharmazeut – ein Brotjob. »Der Vorteil an der Pharmazie ist «, so Groebel heute, »dass man sie im Prinzip zeitlich ungebunden praktizieren kann. Das gab mir genug Raum, um an meiner Kunst zu arbeiten.« Groebels damalige Bilder zielten mit ihrer Abstraktion an damals zeitgenössischen Diskursen vorbei, setzten die sich doch gerade in den Jahren der Neuen Wilden mit Figuration auseinander. Diese deutliche Differenz war dennoch bloß ein nachgeordneter Grund dafür, nach dem Pharmazie-Studium nicht noch ein Kunststudium anzuhängen: »Die Entscheidung gegen die Akademie bereue ich nicht!«, sagt Groebel im Gespräch.

»Sie beruhte auf der Ablehnung, der sehr hierarchischen Strukturen, die mit dem Konzept des Meisterschülers damals noch sehr ausgeprägt waren.«

So wenig er ihn bereut, so sehr hat der Beschluss gegen eine klassische künstlerische Laufbahn auch den Rest seiner Karriere beeinflusst. Netzwerke um Galerist*innen, Künstler*innen und Kritiker*innen konnte Groebel nur gedrosselt aufbauen, der Nachteil des alternativen Wegs zeigte sich hier am deutlichsten. Als Groebel in den 90ern nach Köln kam, landete er in einer an Bedeutung verlierenden Kunstmetropole, die aber noch durch (männliche) Stars und Sternchen der Szene geprägt war. Ein Umstand, auf den er mit wenig Sentiment zurückblickt: »Ich finde die Kunstszenen in Köln heute viel attraktiver und angenehmer. Sie ist diverser und gleichberechtigter, interessanter, nicht ganz so Testosteron-gesteuert. Das halte ich für einen großen Fortschritt.«

Ob diese breiter aufgestellte Szene der Grund ist, für die allmähliche (Wieder)Entdeckung seines Werks, die vor zwei Jahren begann und nun in der Ausstellung im Düsseldorfer Kunstverein gipfelt, das sei dahingestellt. Ganz sicher ist: Nach ersten erfolgreichen Schritten in den 90er und frühen 00er Jahren, verschwand Groebel von der Bildfläche und arbeitete abseits des Marktes weiter. Vermutlich konservierte jener Abstand zum Spotlight des meist auch schnellebigen Kunstbetriebs sein Werk: Groebels Kunst wirkt 2023 so frisch, aktuell und dringlich, dass die jahrelange Ignoranz des Betriebs kaum mehr nachvollziehbar ist.

Besonders aufregend ist sein einzigartiger technischer Ansatz: Die maschinengestützte Malerei.

Ein aus Technik-Müll von Münsteraner Schrottplätzen zusammengebautes AirBrush-System, das in einem komplexen Verfahren Farbe aufträgt – die In-

halte werden über den PC eingespeist. Die Grundlage, so Groebel, sei ein Cyberpunk-Ethos gewesen: Aus den »Abfall-Produkten« der Industriegesellschaft werden neue Gerätschaften gebaut. Das erinnert nicht ganz zufällig an die australischen Filme der Mad Max-Reihe, die im gleichen Geist entstanden sind. Für Groebel waren jedoch die Science-Fiction-Autoren Philipp K. Dick und Neal Stephenson (»Snow Crash«) zentrale Einflüsse. Den Farbauftrag via Maschine könnte man derweil leicht mit den künstlerischen (Industrie-)Druckverfahren verwechseln, die Künstler*innen wie Wade Guyton einige Prominenz in den letzten Jahren verschaffen konnten; ein Trugschluss! Statt eines additiven Farbmischprozesses aus drei oder vier Grundfarben, arbeitet Groebel mit echten Farben, die nach und nach angelegt werden – dem klassischen Öl- und Acrylmalen sehr viel näher als man anfänglich vermutet.

Diese technische Besonderheit wäre gleichwohl nur bedingt interessant, wenn die Bildinhalte des Wahl-Ehrenfelders nicht ebenso ungewöhnlich und faszinierend

wären. Groebels Porträts stellen Figuren einer Fernsehlandschaft dar, die sich Ende der 70er durch Einführung der Privaten sowie Offenen Sender rasant geändert und beizeiten wahnwitzige Bilder und Figuren produziert hat. Eingefangen als, heute würde man sagen: Screenshots, aus der ganzen Welt empfangen via Satellitensystem: Groebel eignete sich in den Jahren zwischen 1989 und 2001 die skurriilen Figuren aus der Geschichte des TVs an – per Maxime alle so marginal, dass sie nicht einmal als Fußnote noch irgendwo erscheinen – und bannte sie auf die Leinwand. Die maschinengestützte Malerei vereinfachte zeitgleich die Übersetzung der Bildröhren-Ästhetik des Standard Definition-Fernsehens: An den Kanten ausfransende, leicht verschwommene Gestalten bevölkern seine quadratischen Gemälde.

So faszinierend die geschichtslosen Schulter- und Bruststücke – die Darstellungsform offenbart Groebels explizit malerischen Gestus, in dem hier operiert wird – durch ihre verletzte und verletzliche Schönheit sind, bisweilen schocken sie aber in ihrem abjektierten Bildinhalten. Neben Fingernägel kauenden Frauen findet man auch (angedeuteten) Splatter und Gewalt. Diese ist dennoch nie real, sondern immer nur »Teil einer Medien-Gewalt-Fantasie«, also fake.

»A Change in Weather« ist bereits am Anfang des neuen Kunstjahres eine der wichtigsten Ausstellungen 2023. So erfolgreich, dass man sich fragt, ob es demnächst auch neues Material gibt. Die Maschine habe nach 2007 lange stillgestanden, aber »sie läuft fast wieder«. Das neuerliche Interesse weckt Begehrlichkeiten – ein großes Glück für eine Kölner Kunstfigur, die schon immer souverän unabhängig positioniert hat.

— LARS FLEISCHMANN

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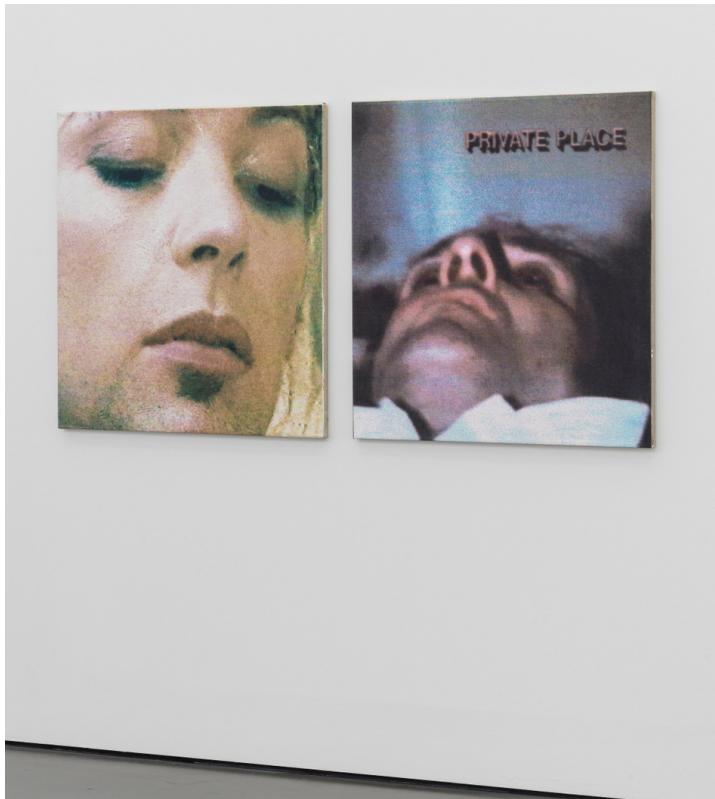
A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989–2001). Kunstverein der Rheinlande und Westfalen, Grabbeplatz 4, Düsseldorf, bis 24.2.; Di–So 11–18 Uhr



JANUARY 2023

"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

Matthias Groebel: A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)



Matthias Groebel, L0895 (1995), L0793, (1993), installation view *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 2022, photo: Cedric Mussano.

Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf

December 10, 2022 through February 26, 2023

By JOSEPH NECHVATAL, January 2023

Before masquerading as a dead, heavy-drinking **Chicago bellhop known for his duplicitous production of Polaroid thoughtographs**, Matthias Groebel made between 1989 and 2001 a series of fiercely stylish paintings of the human figure without touching brush to canvas. It partakes in a rather severe media art style I will call reckless realism—and is evidenced in his current exhibition of thirty-five 95x95cm acrylic paintings on canvas at the Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen in Düsseldorf. **Groebel** painted them with his home-made computer-robotic painting machine—taking as subject matter the (then) new media condition of open-access television.

This smart show, called *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, has been rigorously selected and hung by Kunstverein director/curator Kathrin Bentele and the young artist/curator Andreas Selg—who recently has taken on the interesting collaborative mission of displaying and re-contextualizing Groebel's airbrushed paintings that, previously, sat in stacks in his studio, largely ignored by the art market for twenty years. Now, through Selg's impetus, the art market has enthusiastically taken notice, and a monograph, *Painted Faces: Broadcast Material 1989-2006*, has been produced by Edition Patrick Frey.

The exhibition made clear again for me that Groebel is an artist-painter interested in fugitive technological cultures draped in cheap swag. His work has something to say about how one discovers the ubiquity and velocity of the technological image world while maintaining persistent curiosity.

A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001) is a great invitation to return to Groebel's source. I was struck by how creepy-hilarious the work still is and how accurately it joins with our cultural/psychological moment. The atmosphere of the show is saturated with dated fun frustration, but like all great art from the past, it also speaks to the absurdities and ironies of our current social media moment. As much as the paintings in *A Change in Weather* are about the colloquial density of faces of usually young people we do not know and will never know, they are about the distributive image technology that shaped them and us (then). For Groebel sticks our nose into the face of clandestine electronic technology until it transforms how we see ourselves within our overloaded image world.

Back in the late-1980s, as a German visual cyberpunk thinker/painter, Groebel did not just push around colors on a canvas in Cologne with a hairy stick like most painters were doing, creating zombie post-minimal decorator-friendly abstractions. He put his techno-intellectual talents to use, fidgeting with parabolic antennas in order to find hardcore outré subject matter on marginal satellite TV channels to paint. He was less concerned with the materiality of paint than with the notion/experience of painting as a transparent/virtual medium. As such, his practice issued pungent diagnoses of many German artistic sacred cows, for a start.



Matthias Groebel, *A Change in Weather (Broadcast Material 1989-2001)*, installation view, Kunstverein für die Rheinlande und Westfalen, Düsseldorf, 2022, photo: Cedric Mussano.

A Change in Weather is a wry comic show about the after-death of painting, as well as an extended, international, human-centric mirror. Self-love, trepidation, ennui, and grief are hung on the wall in rows—as well as the weight of social dysfunction. But above all, the gravitas and historical reach of *A Change in Weather* is about where visual image and language don't meet in non sequiturs. Thus a Duchampian/Dadaesque meditation on the near death of coherence—here deployed through painting—so as to obscure and overwhelm puffed-up human egos.

A Change in Weather both expands the powerful constraints of time and place and reinforces the dead internet of bots, fake accounts, artificial intelligence, click farms, interest groups, spam, phishing schemes, and disguised advertising. There is here the impression of the self-image of art as a social good, collapsing under the weight of capitalism's lined-up social dysfunctions. And while it is rather satirical, I would argue that *A Change in Weather* is more deeply alchemical as it is about the transformation of technological change. Groebel has noticed and captured the long-ago ephemeral image world in chaotic flux and arranged the phantasmagorical dysfunctions of its messages into a highly delusional form that projects into the gallery a perverted sense of meaning and beauty. He took the readymade visual language of the time—marginal TV narrow cast emissions—and re-displaced as *objet trouvé* human images he found there, thus inventing his own versions of them. Added to that was taking language to an almost unearthly fractured level through the use of startling insertions and juxtapositions—apropos of nothing.



Matthias Groebel L1095, 1995 Acrylic on canvas (computer-assisted painting) 95 x 95 cm, courtesy gallery Schiefe Zähne, Berlin.

In the Selg's Kunstverein hanging, the resulting mimetic painted face-images are chosen and arranged for us to sneer at (or with) as in a hardcore punk reaction, but also to look closely at as flat surfaces. The indirect lighting is beautiful and the hanging's stylized minimal art pitch establishes seductive visual rhythms. The steady visual beats tempt the eye from across the room. A beat that we absorb but hardly notice. The louche and jaded characters in the paintings seem to be reacting to this cool beat that both identifies and obscures them while the voice-over narrators seem to have lost their ability to use the English language well in describing them. And so convey little meaning about what is happening in their abysmally small staged worlds.

Thus these vapid people seem degraded and made even more absurd by Groebel, who decided to put them through his technological painting process, but at the same time, they are almost sanctified.

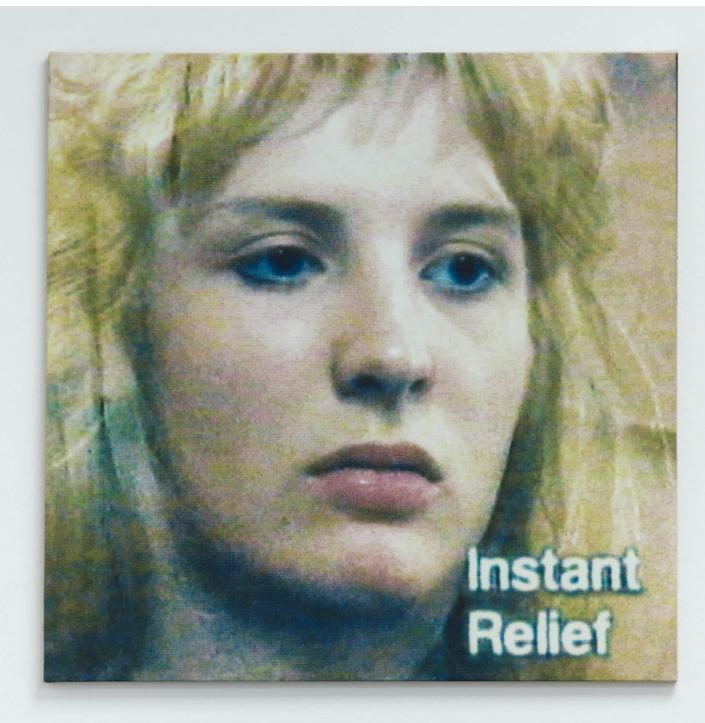
A Change in Weather is Warholian in that sense, but specific to a more radical post-80s painting ambition. This was when the best post-painting painters realized that in order for painting to be dissonant with consumer culture, it had to risk its very identity as painting. But the tendencies Groebel's figurative paintings portray and describe have only intensified. The same visual attraction-repulsion tensions Groebel mined so eloquently still grip us by the throat as we are *more than ever* overcome by bombardments of narcissistic, poorly speaking faces, that we must sort of absorb but don't care two shits about. More than ever we silently say to these faces: go fuck off. That self-reflexivity may be a central social point of these very un-public, anti-social, machine-made paintings. WM



JOSEPH NECHVATAL

Joseph Nechvatal is an American artist currently living in Paris. His *The Viral Tempest* double LP has recently been released on Pentiments, and his new book of poetry *Styling Sagaciousness: Oh Great No!*, by punctum books. He recently exhibited new paintings at Galerie Richard in Paris in a solo exhibition *Turning the Viral Tempest* and is exhibiting early work in the No Wave survey exhibition *Who You Staring At: Culture visuelle de la scène no wave des années 1970 et 1980* at The Centre Pompidou from February 1st to May 15th.

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Untitled, 1995 Acrylic on canvas (computer-assisted painting); 95 x 95 cm, courtesy gallery D R E I, Cologne.



IVIOUSSE

A large, stylized word "motivation" is centered within a circular gradient background that transitions from light green at the top to dark teal at the bottom. The word is written in a bold, italicized font with a white outline and a yellow-to-orange gradient fill.

Rhea Dillon
Ufuoma Essi
Matthias Groebel
Saodat Ismailova
Karla Kaplun
Michel Majerus
Reba Maybury
Niklas Taleb

From the Engine Room: Matthias Groebel Moritz Schepер

Among all the painters who have abandoned their brushes, Matthias Groebel occupies a special position. Upon the introduction of satellite television, Groebel began trawling the frequencies of obscure channels, compiling and composing images from their transmissions that he then transferred onto canvas using a homemade device. His oeuvre falls somewhere between the history of painting, cyberpunk, and the flickerings of the cathode ray tube.

No text currently written about Groebel can omit the details of his biography. For instance that he worked part-time in a pharmacy, using the rest of his days to make art for which no audience existed—until, in his sixties, he suddenly found himself discovered and embraced by the art world (in the last ten months alone, he has had solo shows at Galerie Bernhard in Zurich, Drei in Cologne, and most recently Berlin's Schiefe Zähne, with a Kunstverein show coming soon). Or that he at some point wired a new computer program up to a fischertechnik children's construction kit to create the basis of a painting machine, which he would subsequently iteratively refine and modify. Looking at the paintings this device spat out over the years almost automatically places Groebel in a lineup with Taslima Ahmed, Gili Tal, Alan Michael, and Wade Guyton—painters who print onto canvas as a way of forging a new path out of the exhaustion and negation of their medium. Yet anyone who sees this as evidence of Groebel's "ostensibly highly contemporary approach"¹ ignores the fact that these works were mostly produced a decade before the arrival of the first multi-color plotters.

That Groebel's paintings are currently capturing the hearts of so many is not, however, primarily due to how they were made. Take *L1096* (1996), a quadriptych whose four panels splice together close-ups of bodies and faces, as if carving out the element of transgression inherent in any excess. One features the words "Lapping Up Luxury," irritatingly positioned on the picture plane and with a meta appeal that may be purely imagined. The fleshy diptych *L0599* (1999) is similar; somewhere between alternative medicine and sexual deviance, it shows painfully stretched necks, ironically annotated with "Both ways / save us." These paintings equally display features that have characterized Groebel's works from the mid-1980s onward: a strong compositional control over the panels and details, which are additionally furnished with sections of text, and the unbelievably dominant and trancelike picture quality of the cathode ray tube screens of that era, which the artist skillfully transferred into his paintings. Moreover, the chosen footage is itself trancelike and distinctive in every respect. Groebel dug his way through a vast number of underground channels during this pioneer period of analog television, some of which broadcasted extremely bizarre material. This new technology opened up to the artist such strange and eccentric worlds as bodyhacking, cyberpunk, and acid communism, and his fascination with them oozes out of every work.

Groebel straddles two positions: that of the artist as a figure who records the vibrations of the world with highly tuned sensors, and that of the advanced techie (that he was and is). For this reason, the painting process occupies a

central role within his work. The notion of a mysterious machine always runs the risk of taking on mythical dimensions (one need only think of Franz Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*) overshadowing the actual sensation of the paintings themselves; this is especially true in the case of Groebel's Cinderella story. In the absence of any established language for describing them, his works are sometimes identified as "computer-robotic-assisted-paintings,"² but the notion that he merely had to select a file to be printed is entirely misguided. In fact, he developed a machine-assisted painting process that used a computer-controlled airbrush to apply paint in multiple semitransparent layers—a protracted operation full of artistic decisions, since neither the sequence and frequency of the layers, nor their necessary combinations, could be defined in advance. The results were consequently also never reproducible.

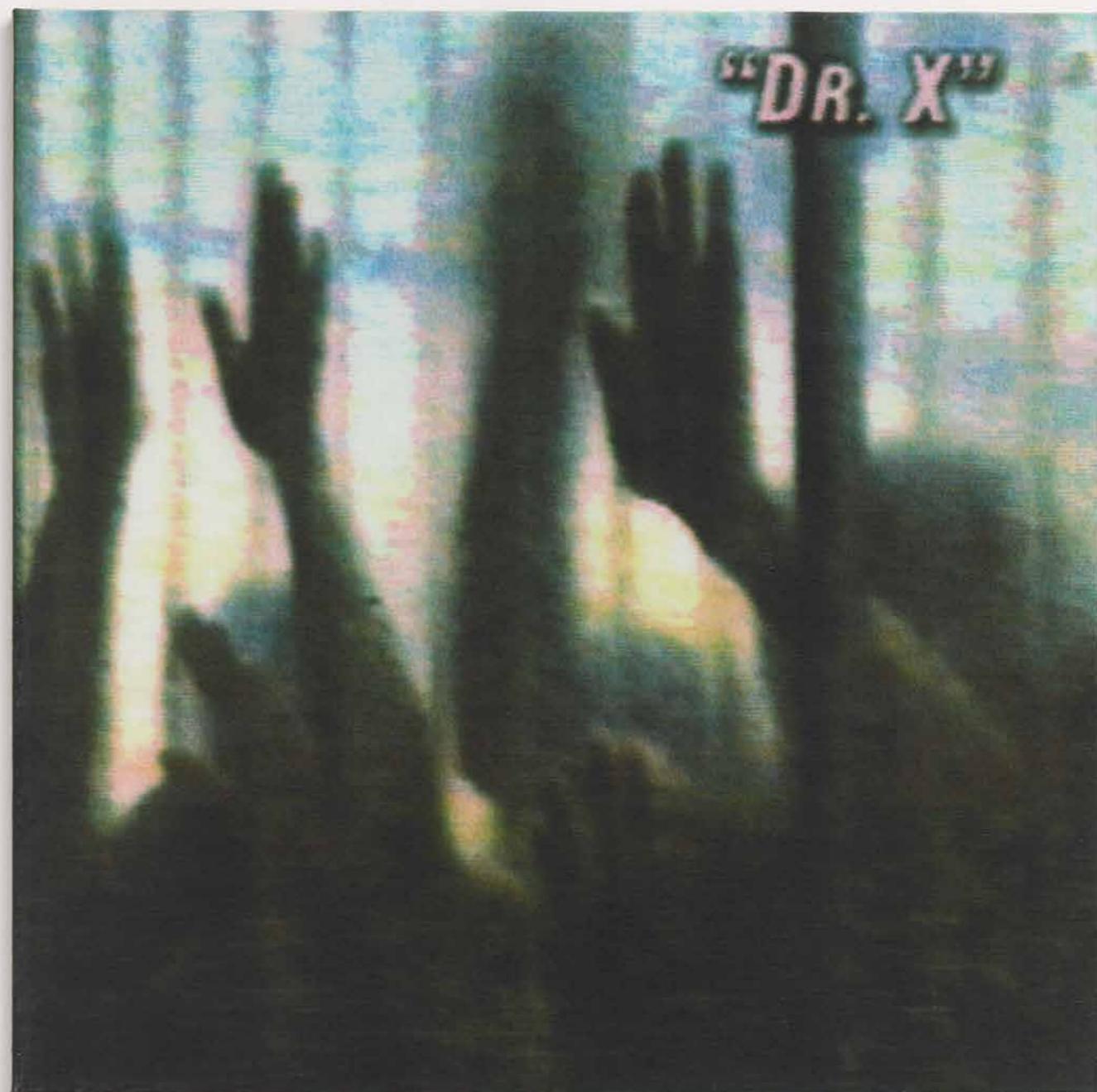
The significance of this process for the works themselves might be explained in light of the historical context in which they were created, for a new condition was becoming established at that time, which continues to this day—namely, that our bodies are constantly bombarded with images in the form of electromagnetic waves without us ever perceiving it. Equally, without painters in the mid-1980s responding in any major way to this new situation: while tech continued to carry utopian potential back then, painting preferred to dwell on secondary issues, with Martin Kippenberger leading the pack. The sense of disillusionment many felt at seeing the new spaces digital technology had opened up becoming increasingly capitalized is correspondingly mirrored in Groebel's oeuvre. When analog television broadcasters transitioned to subscription models around the turn of the millennium, he attempted to hack into their signals.

Worn out and corroded to the point of abstraction, the results would have been unsatisfactory to any TV viewer. But Groebel liked the degraded quality of the images, and transposed their often entirely gray tones into sensational grisailles in his *Hacked Channels* series (1999–2000), which self-evidently recalled the blurred paintings of Gerhard Richter—mercifully forgoing their didactic pathos. The series marks an end point altogether: the switch to payment models terminated the wave bath's messaging stream of images from around 2000 onward, and Groebel's machine correspondingly no longer produces any paintings.³ His oeuvre, by contrast, is much wider than that, full of pockets large and small that are only now being opened. Above all, it's far from complete, as Groebel is currently experimenting with a new machine.

1 Claire Koron Elat, "The Best Painting Shows to See This Spring," *frieze*, May 6, 2022, <https://www.frieze.com/article/best-painting-shows-see-2022-spring>.

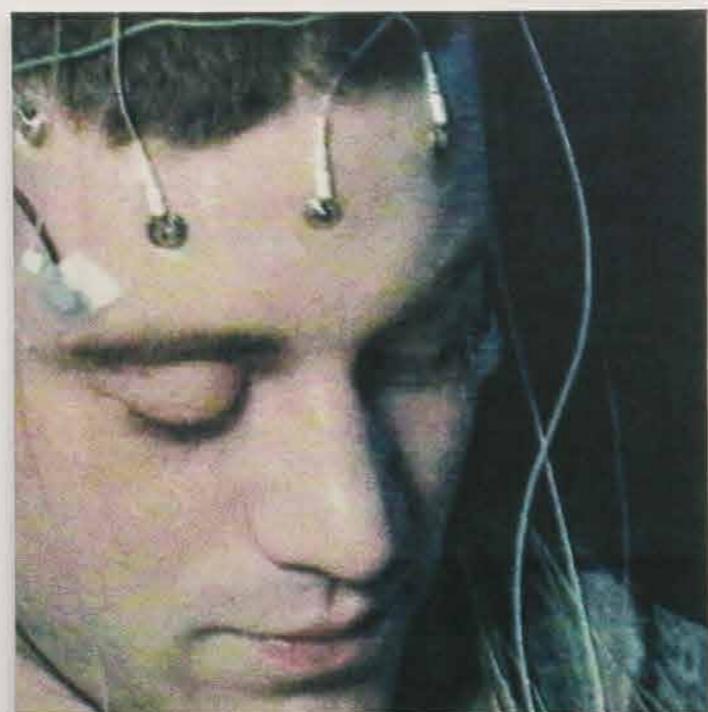
2 Frank Popper, *From Technological to Virtual Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 95.

3 It is significant that Groebel's painting process is irreducibly related to the idea of receiving signals. His painting device is ultimately a receiver, which precisely distinguishes his approach from those of other tech-savvy painters who developed machine-assisted painting processes before the invention of multicolor plotters, for example Bogoslav Kalaš.



125 Matthias Groebel, *Untitled* (detail), 1994. Courtesy: Drei, Cologne. Photo: Simon Vogel
126 127 Matthias Groebel, *L0597*, 1997, *the rhythms of reception* installation view at Schiefe Zähne, Berlin, 2022. Courtesy: the artist and Schiefe Zähne, Berlin. Photo: Cedric Mussano
128 Matthias Groebel, *Untitled*, 2003. Courtesy: the artist and Edition Patrick Frey. Photo: Simon Vogel

129 Matthias Groebel, *Untitled*, 1992. Courtesy: the artist and Edition Patrick Frey.





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