
GROUP EXHIBITION

WINGS - THE WING IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART

SALZBURG VILLA KAST

27 Saturday - 15 Saturday



The concentrated presentation of winged creatures in works by contemporary artists - whether in the form of birds symbolising power, figures from myth and fairy-tale, or angelic apparitions - was the inspiration for a group exhibition on the iconography of the wing in contemporary art. Dramatic representations of soaring, crashing and metamorphosis come together here in conceptual and technoid interpretations of this theme. Eight artists of different generations are represented in this exhibition with a total of forty works.

Besides wood sculptures he created specially for the exhibition, we are showing the monumental bronze Icarus by Stephan Balkenhol (*1957, a pupil of Ulrich Rückriem). He made this for his comprehensive show held in the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden and the Museum Küppersmühle in Duisburg (2006) and in the Museum der Moderne in Salzburg (2007). With its imposing length of 4.8 m, it took up an entire room in the exhibition. Icarus, having plunged to his death, lies on the ground, the remains of his wings still fastened to his arms. Balkenhol is usually reluctant to talk about the content of his works, but he makes an exception for Icarus, whom he sees as a symbol of the myth of the artist, of the danger of overestimating one's own capabilities, of the pride that comes before a fall. In winter 2008/09, the Deichtorhallen in Hamburg showed the largest retrospective of his work to date. In a review of the exhibition printed in the newspaper Welt am Sonntag, Tim Ackermann wrote: "Credit is due to Balkenhol for reclaiming the human figure for German sculpture. That had seemed no longer possible; in the 1980s FRG, non-representational sculpture was regarded as the sole politically correct successor to the figurative monuments that had been required to serve as vehicles for propaganda, from Prussia through National Socialism, to the GDR."

Georg Baselitz (*1938) is represented by two large canvases with eagle motifs and a series of watercolours on the same theme. "I can see better what lies behind me, what I've left behind, where I come from, what I've seen and heard - pretty much crammed with pictures. Where you get them is one thing; what you make of them is another. I go about it archaeologically and examine the sediment", Baselitz remarked in a lecture he gave in 1992, describing painting as an act of subjective reconstruction. During the years 2005-2008 Baselitz concentrated on the Remix series, thus titled for its reference to techniques used in contemporary music. Here he is competing on two fronts: with younger colleagues working in figurative painting, and with his own early works. The focus is on reflection in painting on early programmatic works, and on the anachronistic dialogue between the new Remix series and its formal variation in ink and watercolour. The colour effect of these new paintings gives the impression that Baselitz has in the meantime developed a certain detachment from many of his themes. The concept of the Remix paintings can be regarded in the tradition of the series of paintings by Monet and Munch, which used minimal changes of colour, perspective or expression to explore step by step every possible nuance of a subject. In his eagle pictures, too, Baselitz paraphrases his own historical work in the spirit of the remix idea. Even in his early work, and later in the early 1970s, the motif of the eagle appears in its political symbolic role focusing on the question of national identity.

The ghostly-fine pencil-drawings by Marc Brandenburg (*1965) seem at first glance like snapshots from a bizarre parallel world. His photo-realistic scenes of demonstrators, flag-waving football fans, clowns and fairgrounds, his portraits of friends and relatives, his fountains and monumental Christmas decorations have a perplexingly menacing effect. The shining silvery materiality of the graphite surfaces is combined with soft, finely-nuanced contours, all bathed in a blazing, unreal light. The motifs on the white paper seem to have been deprived of their original peaceful atmosphere. He draws from his own photographs, which attempt to freeze the moment of swinging round from one motif to the other. He is concerned with what lies in between: "It's like editing in film, or the individual frames that make up the film. It's a bit like trying to give a pictorial rendering of an aura", he explained in an interview in 2007. In his speech at the presentation of the prestigious Karl Ströher Prize to Marc Brandenburg in the Frankfurt Museum of Modern Art in 2005, Ulf Poschardt remarked that Brandenburg stands in the tradition of pop and its enthusiasm for the surface, while combining in a contemporary way the ideas of "realism" and "transfiguration". Furthermore, he said that "it was less the world of the media and its images that Brandenburg was looking at, than moments of experienced intensity. A shy viewer [...] has the feeling of looking secretly at the negatives of snapshots of a profoundly perceived life." The hugely elaborate technical splendour and subtlety of Marc Brandenburg's works represent a strange contrast to the brevity of the actual snapshot, of which the motif still remains recognisable. There is an evident affinity with Adolf von Menzel, the 19th-century Prussian genre and historical portraitist, whom Brandenburg admires, but also a relation to Berlin protagonists of the New Objectivity, such as Otto Dix and George Grosz. Here Brandenburg shows drawings of urban motifs of crowds of pigeons in hectic agitation.

The exhibition includes a historic work by the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers (1924-1976) - associated with the surrealists and the representatives of Nouveau Réalisme: one of his classic text panels with words and single letters punched in. The work L'oise, L'aile (The Goose, The Wing) dating from 1969 looks like a dadaist poem with the individual pieces, freely arranged on the background, alluding to the content of the words. Continuing the work of his compatriot René Magritte, here he examines the contradictions between word and image.

The work of Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, who made their reputation officially as a couple in the course of the 1990s, is classified as belonging to Moscow conceptualism, a trend that owes its name to the essay *Moscow Romantic Conceptualism*, written in 1974 by the philosopher Boris Groys. Ilya (*1933) and Emilia (*1945) were amongst the protagonists of the first generation of conceptualists. Like Broodthaers, Ilya Kabakov began first of all "to explore the relationship between picture, writing, comment and object, and later used Soviet everyday refuse for his art, thus effecting a recycling of everyday objects from Russian culture. In so doing, he developed concepts that were adopted and modified by ensuing generations" (Sylvia Sasse, 2006). One of these concepts was his practice of total installation, completely including the viewers or participants, as well as a technique of commentary, elevating an artistic meta-discourse to the status of artwork. At the centre of a group contributed to the exhibition by Ilya & Emilia Kabakov to our Wings exhibition is the room installation *How Can One Change Oneself?* (1998), which focuses on the utopian character of projects formulated in the Soviet era: anyone seeking self-improvement has the opportunity here of strapping on the angel's wings hanging on the wall and sitting at a desk to carry out everyday office tasks.

In his figurative painting, Alex Katz (*1927) was always somewhere between abstraction and realism. He was doing figurative painting in American billboard format when the whole of American art had turned decisively away from representation. At that time, Katz countered the painters who obstinately insisted on an impulsive, individual signature or the presentation of hardly noticeable perceptual differences, with his cool treatment of a fully visible, verifiable world. He was, he says, deliberately defending himself against abstract expressionism and the passionate self-representation of painters such as Jackson Pollock. "With no great detours, the young painter harks back to the usable past of America, to Georgia O'Keeffe, Fairfield Porter, Ralston Crawford and Edward Hopper" (Werner Spies, 2004). The motifs in Katz's work are mainly portraits, landscapes and objects from his immediate surroundings. He spends several months a year in his summer residence in Maine, where he painted *Yellow Seagull*, his contribution to this exhibition.

The language of material plays an essential role in the paintings of Anselm Kiefer (*1945), where the texture is usually sedimentary, and thus in the tradition of German art informel as typified by Emil Schumacher. "For thirty years, the oeuvre of Anselm Kiefer has been developing in a process of sedimentation, crossing, and reworking of themes, motifs, and constellations that keep appearing in very different media and overlap in them [...]. The more one becomes familiar with his work and the better one knows it, the more one gets the feeling of dealing with a kind of labyrinth that gradually grows in size and complexity [...]" (Daniel Arasse, 2001). Kiefer's most recent group of works focuses - after an interval of many years - on the Christian religion. Here landscapes and seascapes become dramatic scenes centred on the figure of the Virgin: the Assumption, the Descent of the Virgin on the third day, the birth of the Virgin and the Holy House of Loreto, the invocation of Mary in the Laurentian Litany, the Ave Maria prayer and the appearance of God in the Burning Bush. In our exhibition, Kiefer is represented by three large-scale works on canvas, entitled *San Loreto*. These pictures, whose principal motif is winged stones, refer to a myth which grew up around the so-called Holy House within the Basilica of Loreto - reputed to be the house where Mary, mother of Jesus was born, and to have been carried by angels from Nazareth to Loreto.

The work of the Austrian artist Gerwald Rockenschau (*1952) has been associated with Neo-Geo since the early 1980s, when a group of young artists concentrated on the formal vocabulary of the abstract avant-garde. Neo-Geo permeated the aesthetics of American minimal art with the consumeristic position of pop art. Rockenschau's art cannot be simply categorised in any particular style, however; in his animations, foil pictures, objects and site-related installations, he refers in equal measure to ideas and positions of modernism and to phenomena of everyday culture. In an act of radical reduction and concentration (the two basic principles of the artist's method), these are scaled down to bare essentials. Thus also the untitled wall object shown here, which shows a technoid, geometrised variant of a winged being.

The New York artist Tom Sachs (*1966) achieved fame in the 1990s with his home-made replicas satirising consumer and cultural icons satirising the American DIY movement. Also in the four works shown here, concerning the myth of Reynard the Fox, Sachs uses the everyday techniques of fretwork and wood-burning (especially popular in America) to illustrate the fabulous creatures taken from an edition of Goethe's *Reinecke Fuchs*. Winged creatures are given a special place in these works - from the simple swarm of bees and affectionate swans all the way to mythical creatures.

In 2000, Thomas Sokolowski, Director of the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, remarked of drawing in the work of Andy Warhol (1928-1987): "While most often seen as the crown prince of the avant-garde, Warhol's drawings provide clear evidence that draughtsmanship sat at the very center of his artistic life. He learned to draw in the most academic manner from his years at Carnegie Tech. This skill was further honed during his stay on Madison Avenue working as an illustrator for commercial advertising. Taken together these two experiences resulted in a finely wrought, clean, quick line which created the essential artistic skeleton on which all of his art was built. I would hazard the opinion that Warhol was every bit the draughtsman that Ingres, Holbein, or even Picasso was." In the Wings exhibition, we are showing thirteen of the pre-pop drawings of cherubs, fairies and children in elf costumes, together with six American Eagles. "The drawn line appears as very self-confident in its reserve, and as such reminding one of Matisse" (Rainer Crone, 2006).