

Helmhaus Zürich

2 December 2011 – 29 January 2012

Marc-Antoine Fehr
Andrea Heller

Marc-Antoine Fehr and Andrea Heller are showing their paintings at Helmhaus Zürich. The two artists could not have a more divergent approach to the medium; each has a thoroughly distinctive position. What they do have in common, however, is a certain sensibility – a love of subtle insinuation, an eschewal of direct formulation, an awareness of underlying moods and atmospheres tinged with melancholy and wit in equal measure. These are two separate solo shows, yet the points of contact between them are readily found.

Helmhaus Zürich has brought Marc-Antoine Fehr and Andrea Heller together under the rubric of painting. With that in mind, it should nevertheless be noted that painting has a very different meaning for both. Fehr, born in Zurich in 1953, is a full-blooded painter, self-taught in the craft of oils, which he has mastered to perfection. Heller, currently based in Paris, is of a younger generation. She has explored a variety of media and treats painting (in watercolours and inks) as just one discipline among others. Both artists are showing works from the last five years, with the focus on their latest creations. The exhibitions have been curated by Zurich-based art historian Caroline Kesser.

With his classic, figurative painting, **Marc-Antoine Fehr** is a singular phenomenon in the world of Swiss art. He is something of a maverick whose regular appearances on the exhibition scene, though infrequent, have always drawn attention. His last show in Zurich was in 2006 at Thomas Ammann Fine Art. Before that, his *Journal de Pressy* was shown at the 2003 exhibition of the ETH's Prints and Drawings Collection. Following on from these two exhibitions, Fehr now presents two focal points of his latest work at Helmhaus Zürich: mostly large-format oils in still-life style and *Paysage sans fin*, a strip over 500 metres long, composed of hundreds of gouaches measuring 7.5 x 102 cm. He has been working on this endless landscape – one of his unfinished and, in fact, unfinishable projects – since 1999 and is now presenting it to the public for the very first time at Helmhaus Zürich. It is on view in a separate room in the shape of an almost complete oval that spirals over fourteen levels from floor to ceiling. Like the diary pages brought together in his *Journal de Pressy*, this sketch-like work outlines all the themes that preoccupy him as an artist.

While this strip of landscape with its intuitive sequence of scenes reaches beyond Fehr's subjective perception to describe the very flow of time itself, his oil paintings, created at the same time, appear to bring time to a standstill, as though frozen. In this latest phase of his work, the figurative aspect that has always underpinned even the most fantastical of Marc-Antoine Fehr's compositions seems to be even more evident than before -- not in a bid to achieve the most realistic rendering possible, but rather in a bid to question a reality that is teeming with associative insinuation and yet conceals so much. Artefacts from the world of play are currently the focus of his interest. The objects he paints are marked by the traces of use, telling not only of yearning, but also of painful loss. Through the sensuality of his painting with its sense of detachment heightened by monumentality, he pays homage to the anonymous creators of these humble objects.

Andrea Heller has demonstrated her interdisciplinary agility in exhibitions mounted in recent years at the Galerie Hubert Bächler in Zurich. At the Helmhaus, however, she concentrates on a single

aspect of her oeuvre, albeit a central one: watercolours and inks. Her paintings are often developed on the basis of a nucleus, bound by an intricate framework of signs, and eschewing all grand gestures. Her large-scale works on paper are dominated by isolated objects that trigger clear associations, even though they elude identification. Often extremely sculptural, they are at times organic in character and at others architectural and seem to hover on the whiteness of the paper. Occasionally, a title comes to the fore: *Versteck* [Hiding Place] for instance. That is the name Heller has given to several of the constructs that look like sculptures made of endlessly folded, creviced paper. Indeed, all of her paintings might be described as hiding-places, for they conceal far more than they reveal. From time to time, her objects take on such a highly charged motile quality that they almost seem as though they might change their form at any moment.

Andrea Heller uses colour with great care, tending towards a subdued palette enlivened by nuances and subtle tonal graduations. Her small watercolours show a more spontaneous hand than her large works, but even here she reins in her gesturality and keeps to subdued colours. Her penchant for geometric forms is also clearly evident. From the most succinct of forms, human figures emerge, as if Andrea Heller herself were amused by this anthropomorphic touch.

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To coincide with this exhibition, and beyond, the first **publication** on the work of Andrea Heller, with texts by Fanni Fetzer and Caroline Kesser, designed by Franziska Burkhardt, will be published by Edition Patrick Frey. At the book launch on 12 January 2012, Daniel Morgenthaler will talk with Andrea Heller about her exhibition and the book. A book on the work of Marc-Antoine Fehr, with essays by Caroline Kesser and Jean-Christophe Bailly, designed by Peter Zimmermann, will be published and distributed by Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne. In addition, Scheidegger & Spiess will publish *H.P. Weberhans – Skulpturen/Sculptures* with texts by Simon Maurer, Hans-Joachim Müller and Daniele Musconico, designed by Bruno Margreth. This publication on the work of sculptor H.P. Weberhans, who had a solo exhibition at Helmhaus Zürich in 2004, will be presented to the public at a book launch on 18 January 2012.

Once again, two **concerts** will be held in the Fehr and Heller exhibitions, on 16 December 2011 and on 24 January 2012, respectively: Zurich-based composer Edu Haubensak has written a 44-minute solo piece, *Three Timpani*, for freelance percussionist Martin Lorenz. Lorenz specialises in contemporary and experimental music; he has worked with a variety of musicians and composers on solo and chamber music projects. Young Swiss jazz musician Vera Kappeler creates evocatively atmospheric pieces of lyrical poetry on piano and reed organ. Her music is exciting and melancholy.

As ever, **guided tours** for adults and children, led by Kristina Gersbach and Andrea Huber-Stutz, will provide further insight into the exhibitions. Details of all these events can be found on the enclosed invitation cards.

A prologue to the solo exhibition by **San Keller**, scheduled for next year at Helmhaus Zürich, is being held at the Berufsmesse Zürich. The list of professions showcased at this annual vocational fair is long – but artists have so far not been represented. Zurich-based artist San Keller now brings the career of the artist to this trade fair. He has invited seven colleagues to represent their craft in direct comparison with other trades and professions, and to provide information about their skills. The artists Pedro Wirz, Christian Vetter, Marina Belobrovaja, Mariann Oppliger/Sophie Hofer and !Mediengruppe Bitnik are participating.

