

Helmhaus Zürich
3 December 2010 – 23 January 2011

***Wenn die Nacht am dunkelsten ist, kommt der Tag* (“When night is at its darkest comes the day”)**

Michael Blättler, Karine Clairsinvil, Cédric Eisenring & Thomas Julier, Esther Gisler, Florin Granwehr, grünkern, Bleta Jahaj, A.C. Kupper, Jso Maeder, Medium, Francisca Silva, Die Weltraumforscher, Ruth Zürcher

Zurich’s Helmhaus invites visitors on a voyage of discovery at its exhibition *When night is at its darkest comes the day*. The works on show by 14 artists are either not yet famous, or have ceased to be. The adventurous and surprising presentation will breathe fresh life into the predictable round of Zurich's art world.

Zurich hasn’t had an exhibition like this in a long time, meandering as it does down roads not taken through the versatile local scene to juxtapose young artists still in training with older colleagues otherwise absent from the public’s radar. And between these two groups are representatives of the middle generation, who while (to some extent) renowned have contributed groups of works as yet unknown. All in all a meticulously arranged bouquet of marvellous blossoms!

The exhibition’s peculiar title gestures at the artists’ modus operandi, their tendency to develop their work without much ado, to accept sacrifices, to buckle down for the long haul until a piece is ready to be displayed in the light of a gallery. *When night is at its darkest comes the day* describes a feature common to all of the works shown: they can be viewed from two sides, from a “day” side and from a “night” side. They emblemize liminal moments of undecidability and ambivalence. “White day stands at the end of black night,” as a Persian proverb has it (Shirana Shahbazi and Tirdad Zolghadr, of the artists’ group Medium, participants in the exhibition, come from Iran). The same sentiment is expressed in a saying from Haiti, the homeland of Karine Clairsinvil – a metaphor rendered grimly literal by the country’s recent ravaging by earthquake and cholera epidemic: “Lè li pi fè nwa se lè sa a li pral fè jou” or “At its darkest, night gives way to the sun.”

It was on the initiative of artists that the show first got off the ground. Our story begins three years ago, when a group of artists approached the City of Zurich’s Department of Culture with a plan to recreate a triptych of “Christmas exhibitions” mounted here in the 1980s and 1990s under the title *Kunstszenen Zürich* (“Zurich’s Art Scene”). Held over the course of three years, the original project had comprised, in its first year, an exhibition without a jury (which prevailed in the face of all naysayers), in its second an event organized by the artists (*raumsprung interlokal* offered the local population access to 277 studios in 2009), and in its third and last year shows at Zurich museums and exhibition halls devoted to local work. The Department of Culture supported the new initiative and invited representatives of the artists and institutions to a roundtable discussion. These negotiations issued in a statement of intent on the part of the Department of Culture; once the latter had subsequently taken up the project once again with the relevant institutions, however, it was unable to make good on its undertaking. This left Helmhaus Zürich, whose remit centrally includes exhibiting local art, the only institution to take on the reprise of *Kunstszenen Zürich* – albeit in an idiosyncratic fashion.

The intentionally subjective selection made by the curators, Michael Hiltbrunner (born 1975, freelance curator, artist and guest lecturer at the University of Zurich) and Simon Maurer (born 1964, head of Helmhaus Zürich), is a testament to the enduring value of explorations in Zurich's eclectic art world. The curators were captivated by labours of love undertaken by individual artistic adventurers, experimenting undaunted over the course of years and decades; by mysterious ideas and theories; by extravagant obsessions. The exhibition deliberately juxtaposes contrasts: expressive trash meets painstaking geometry, craft is paired with intellectual endeavour, broad-ranging research encounters minimalist staging.

The artists chosen are themselves a generational potpourri (from 26 to 68 years old; Ruth Zürcher, who passed away in the spring of this year at the age of 97, would have been the eldest living participant), hail from a variety of different scenes and work in a variety of media, creating sculptures, installations, objects, tapestries, paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, videos, audio works, texts and performances. At the very heart of the exhibition is the encounter with traditional materials and techniques. Immersed in their artistic investigations, the participants have focused exclusively on their work, dedicating long hours to their processes, not shying from repetition and variation but meticulously developing and continuing them in their own semiotic and classificatory universe. Now their work emerges from the personal intimacy of the studio into the light of the public realm, and incites viewers to render their own interpretations of cryptic signs and systems. The exhibition is thus – in its prehistory, its use of materials, and its reception-to-be – nothing less than an adventure.

The show is accompanied by a programme of events. Three evenings combine a presentation of a new publication with a musical premiere against the backdrop of the exhibition itself: a new book by Zurich artist A.C. Kupper (Edition Patrick Frey) meets Joke Lanz's noise performance "Sudden Infant"; new fanzines, published under the Machoverlag imprint under the direction of young artist Francisca Silva, meet performances by Michael Blättler and Marc Matter of the Institut für Feinmotorik, followed by a concert by Die Welttraumforscher in celebration of their 30th anniversary; and on the third evening celebrities from the worlds of graphic arts, photography, music and theory come together when Shirana Shahbazi, Manuel Krebs and Tirdad Zolghadr gather at Helmhaus Zürich to launch a new publication, under the title *Medium*, as the successor to *Shahrazad* magazine, itself featured in the exhibition. The whole culminates in a show by OY, playfully experimental pop music by Joy Frempong.

Michael Hiltbrunner / Simon Maurer

Jso Maeder

Jso Maeder (born 1957, lives in Zurich) studied art in Vienna. His artistic work is attended by studies in cultural philosophy and social theory. His rare exhibitions have taken place in Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and the United States, and he has shown his work only twice in Zurich, once in a privately organized exhibition in an office building and, more recently, at Natasha Akmerova's Barbarian Art Gallery.

Two thick metal tubes are mounted between visitors and Jso Maeder's *muttermund und hauswurst, eine geschichte der kleinen siege und freuden* ("cervix and sausage, an account of little victories and delights") and *the white dot problem*, thus segregating the space of art from that of the public. At the same time, the art on display manages to overcome the barrier – even as the public's curiosity circumvents a rudely erected hurdle, vaguely reminiscent of the rood screen in a church. What is it that must be shielded from excessively direct access? And from what does the public itself require protection?

At issue here is the significance of "civilization", by what means people are "civilized", how they actually comport themselves in close proximity to one another. In close proximity: at work, when engaged in everyday productive activities in the broadest sense, in relations dictated by political hegemony, in association with education, and ultimately in all manner of sexual conjunction. At issue is the way a civilization deals with the fact that people exhibit such traits as a will to power, brutality and sexual desire. At issue, finally, is the nature of the relationship obtaining between such a will to power and sexual desire.

Jso Maeder had already embarked on his drawing sequence when the airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center; a few years later came the images from Abu Ghraib, themselves not exactly an earnest of civilization. We live in an era of ubiquitous hardcore pornography. Maeder's work, with its critique of civilization, is created against a backdrop of reality. Both of the pieces exhibited are part of *Zum Glück auf Erden* ("Happily on earth", 1999–2007), an ensemble work accompanied by an eponymous volume, available at the reception, with essays by Bazon Brock, Volker Demuth, Christoph Geiser, Simon Maurer, Robert Pfaller and others.

The constellations with which Maeder confronts us are like a brainteaser, a hybrid of desirable proximity and undesirable degeneracy. Maeder is fundamentally attached to the problematic. He does not deny that happiness also includes earthly misery, and his space accordingly resonates with a peculiar bright melancholy, an acceptance of the nature of the human species. His extravagantly theatrical, satirical hyperboles pose questions to – and about – our society, and invite speculation. The artist notes that "to me, speculation is the first step towards asking a question." Indeed, he muses, "if we are out of questions, what does that say about culture as a reflection on humanity within our society?"

Rare enough are the moments in which art tests a freedom grown virtually putative to stage encounters of this kind on perilous ground. Art's preoccupation with taboos has itself become taboo, and culture, too, now voluntarily draws canonical boundaries around what may be desired, what is licit. Poachers are blacklisted, excluded from the system. The word of the day is cultural self-censorship.

It takes courage to transgress, although transgression is among the fundamental duties of cultural enquiry, since culture, as a privileged space for experimentation, can only redraw as fiction the established boundaries of society's mores if it transgresses them; it takes courage to run the gauntlet and enter the inner sanctum of the museum, therein to brave the proximity of this encounter: to be "in", to be within this ring, within this field in which so much is at stake that observation from outside is in fact virtually impossible. And whether we hold such debates "from within" or "from without" is itself part of the debate – which brings us back to the barrier.

Simon Maurer

Francisca Silva

In her contribution to the exhibition, Francisca Silva (born 1984 in Mendrisio, resides in Zurich) presents an installation created especially for the show. *F.R.A. – This is not a Love Story* invites visitors to (literally) enter the world of Fra, as the artist refers to herself. They find themselves in a room entirely of her own design in which many of her works are displayed, including a video by the artist herself and one work by a colleague.

Silva typically formulates the principals of her method in a series of manifestos, the second of which is presented here for the first time. The artist's books that she produces in her own publishing house, Machoverlag, and which are distinguished by free-wheeling, fragmentary word play, afford additional insight into her work.

The cavernous space she created over the course of weekly do-it-yourself sessions with the help of various assistants, and which is reminiscent of the Merzbau, testifies not only to exhaustion but also to the artist's complete identification with her work. She dissolves herself within it, makes of herself a component of her art, views her very body as a material for her work. Silva neither maintains a critical distance from her art nor adopts an ironic attitude to it; rather, she embarks on a poetic quest, and her chief discoveries lie in the realms of pop and subculture.

Step into the cave and breathe the sweet scent of sex, which feels quite at home in the white-cardboard-lined space and scarcely misses the customary red velvet. You can let yourself be slipped in nonchalantly, lost in studious contemplation, get progressively absorbed by the world of the *F.R.A. Vögelsessel* ("F.R.A. fucking chair") and its many obscene depictions. Or you can keep a careful distance, like the artist herself on her *Tripticon*, as she meditates on the goings-on in our pornographic pop culture. Silva keeps just such a distance from her own work, casts a contemplative eye on what she herself has so recklessly created.

Michael Hiltbrunner

On 7 January 2011 Francisca Silva presents new fanzines from her Machoverlag imprint at Helmhaus Zürich.

Florin Granwehr

Florin Granwehr (born 1942 in St. Gallen, resides in Zurich since 1969) has been sculpting since the second half of the 1960s while also creating a collection of drawings that to date numbers over 30,000. Beginning in the 1980s, Granwehr has produced more than 20 large-scale sculptures and works of public art that command the space in which they are installed, among them *Raumwandler* ("Spacewalker", 1984), on the grounds of the University of Zurich's Irchel campus, *Axiomat* (1989/90), on the landing pier at Wollishofen, and *Transeunt* (2005), erected in front of the Zurich Cantonal Hospital's staff apartment building.

Granwehr's medium-format ideal structures address space and its perception. The artist paints the square wooden bars of which they are composed white and polishes them to a high shine, like piano keys. The eight such structures on display under the title *Angulon* (1992–95) are a prime example: Granwehr uses the angles of their quadratic frames to generate eight permutations. In the process, the mathematical formula deployed – of the artist's own devising – is realized as spatial formations and presented in the form of physically tangible objects to the public, which may for instance react differently to different arrangements of angles. Abstract, artistically created physics thus interacts with the organic corporeality and aesthetic sensibility of the human being.

In 1998 the artist-cum-scientist discovered the eponymous "Granwehr Theorem" in the digits of that year, and his work has been thriving on the aperçu ever since. Essentially based on the sequence 3/4/5/6, Granwehr's discovery yields some amazing equations, as for instance the following: $33 + 44 + 55 + 66 = 198$; $198 : (3 + 4 + 5 + 6) = 11$; $1998 : (3 + 4 + 5 + 6) = 111$; $951 - 753 = 198$; $357 - 159 = 198$. Granwehr transfers such numerical ratios to progressions of angular dimensions and lateral lengths, which he then subjects to rotations and inflections. In contrast to Esther Gisler, Granwehr works with finite parameters whose limits are contained within them and which afford his ascetic analyses a veritable cornucopia of inexhaustible potential and more than enough room to maneuver. As he puts it, "Whenever I think I am able to describe a particular order, it eludes me. The theorem is like an untamable beast." For him, order is that which leads directly to chaos: "The more order you have, the more chaos there is."

Simon Maurer

The world is forever
Rearranging itself,
Changing itself,
Estranging itself

(FL. GR.)

Ruth Zürcher

Ruth Zürcher (born 1913 in Düsseldorf, died 2010 in Forch/ZH) remained active as an artist into old age and left behind an oeuvre created over more than 70 years. The exhibition includes a small selection of works in textile from the period between 1962 and 1990 as a tribute to Ruth Zürcher, who died in the spring of 2010 at the age of 97.

Originally from Düsseldorf and trained in creating stage sets, the artist settled in Zurich following her marriage to the sculptor Arnold Zürcher, worked as a costume designer at Zurich's Schauspielhaus, and began weaving pictorial hangings in the 1940s. Having taught herself the art of tapestry-making for her early figurative works, Zürcher switched in the late 1950s to abstraction and developed her own formal vocabulary, which in the 1970s gave rise to three-dimensional assemblages. Many of her works are today in the possession of congregation halls, churches, schoolhouses and senior citizens' homes in and around Zurich.

In her work Zürcher did not rely on the classical abstraction of the modernists but decided instead "to work freely and impulsively, in spontaneous dialogue with the material and its colour," as she wrote in 1966. She forbade aestheticization of her creations, preferring to see herself in a "time of upheaval" for which she constantly sought new means of expression. She pushed the evident symbolic abstraction of her work to such a degree that none of her traces is unambiguously significant, but rather cedes centre stage to imaginative a free association. The artist was motivated by an "inner image", which lent her work a particularly personal cast: "I attempt to preserve the living effect of all elements of a piece – the craftswoman's fancy, her spontaneous play and invention while seated at the loom – by allowing things to occur as they will, as they must, while I work; and thus I actually weave myself into my work."

Michael Hiltbrunner

Karine Clairsinvil

Karine Clairsinvil (born 1980 in Port-au-Prince, resides in Zurich) grew up in Haiti and has lived in Switzerland since 2005. She is currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Fine Arts programme at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

“La nuit je ne dors pas, je vais à la recherche du jour. Je traverse le ciel à la rencontre des étoiles, des Petits hommes me portent d’astres en comètes et je me réveille de l’autre côté du soleil. J’ai traversé la nuit à pas de Petits hommes des étoiles...” (I don’t sleep at night, I go in search of the day. I roam the skies, I meet the stars, Little Men carry me to constellations and comets, and I awake on the other side of the sun. I have traversed the night at the pace of the Little Men of the Stars...)

Clairsinvil refers to the subjects of *Petits hommes des étoiles* (“Little Men of the Stars”) as “my friends and protectors”. She has been at work on the series for many years – indeed, since her childhood. These friends of hers bear her through the celestial night, “to the other side of the sun” and into the day. Visitors are encircled by expressive figures, towering above them at 3.8 metres in height. The pictures (drawings?) were created at night. On the floor. Clairsinvil used only her fingers to paint them. She sets particular store by the connection with her nocturnal world, with dreams and spirits that are not physically present, but exist nonetheless.

Clairsinvil, who had been on a series of sojourns in New Caledonia, on the other side of the earth, was invited this autumn by Les Arts Bougent, an artists’ organization there, to spend a few months in the South Pacific. She is particularly intrigued by the totem cult of the Kanak people, natives of the northern region of New Caledonia, by their masks and costumes, divinities and customs. Clairsinvil returned from New Caledonia a few days prior to the opening of the present exhibition, having sent on ahead for display at the Helmhaus a wooden crate with the stirring title *Petits hommes des étoiles sur Grande Terre* (“Little Men of the Stars on Grande Terre”: the latter is the largest island in the New Caledonian archipelago). Another component of the ensemble was until recently on display at the Centre d’Art de Nouméa in New Caledonia.

“Human beings are little universes unto themselves, encountering, caroming off, entertaining one another, merging and occasionally creating new universes. Mind and spirit are the core of the human universe, fusing with the body in atomic symbiosis. Everything arises from this core, from within. The body expresses, conveys, translates everything that flows through the universe into a host of tongues. – Portraying what is within is my passion. It excites me to track down the invisible, to sense it, to perceive it, to translate it into my own visual idiolect and to give it visible form. And then, all of a sudden, in their capacity as images, my renderings of the impalpable themselves belong to the material world, and can as such be experienced anew, interpreted, sensed, comprehended and perceived.” (Karine Clairsinvil)

To the native of Haiti, New Caledonia represents the homeland she has always wanted. She has gone through hell herself, the artist says, and emerged unscathed. Earthquakes, hurricanes, cholera, political unrest – in Haiti, the news of the day is dominated by these themes. There is a Haitian proverb that comes very close to the title of the Helmhaus show : “Lè li pi fè nwa se lè sa a li pral fè jou” or “At its darkest, night gives way to the sun”. In spite of all they have suffered, Haitians have not lost their faith in happy ends.

Simon Maurer

Michael Blättler

Michael Blättler (born 1972 in Altstätten, SG, resides in Zurich) graduated from the F+F School of Art and Media Design in 2000 and has been working as an artist and poster-maker since. He is also a member of the bands Sissikontest (since 2004) and Deconstructing Drumboys (since 2010).

His slide projection *81 aus 572* ("81 of 572") comprises selected exhibits from a large collection of slides made by an unknown photographer between 1956 and 1960. Blättler's selection from among the exterior views, including many landscapes, taken in the United States constitutes an ensemble that seems uniform, but in which each of the 81 images is capable of standing alone. Visitors can use headphones to listen to the audio work *106 aus 565* ("106 of 565"), assembled out of messages left on disused telephone answering machines whose tapes come from the artist's own personal collection. Both works turn viewers into voyeurs as they inspect the images, presented in circular form reminiscent of peepholes, and listen in on messages intended for other people. At the same time, the newly audible answering machine tapes are a portal to the abyss, as spontaneous messages meant for one single person before their deletion take centre stage and constitute the legacy of strangers.

Michael Blättler appropriates vectors of memory – in this case, tapes and slides – and presents them in a new form, thus transmuting the process of triage from among a store of *trouvailles* into a central artistic activity. In fact, practices of memorization and individualization play a central role in the filtering out of specificities from something quite normal. The selection process may issue in an artist's game of memory – and a lucid commentary on the sociology of mnemonics.

Michael Hiltbrunner

On 7 January 2011 Michael Blättler shows *Zufallskomposition aus Sinustönen* ("Random composition using sinus tones") at Helmhaus Zürich, a performance with six cassette decks.

Esther Gisler

In addition to her work as an artist, Esther Gisler (born 1945 in Horgen, resides in Zurich) teaches landscape architecture at the Fachhochschule Rapperswil (HSR). She has created several art works for the public space. After art, her second great passion is archery, which allows her to experience the transition from tension to relaxation.

Despite its founding in basic geometry, Gisler's work manifests organic traits. As rational and physically manifest as her enquiries may seem, yet they are guided by a ludic impulse and ultimately attuned to an intangible, metaphysical dimension. Gisler's oeuvre is driven by the angle as mediator between the second and third dimensions, as the abstraction of all relations. "By restricting myself to the angle," writes Gisler in her preface to *Der Winkel* (2006), "I attain a realm that harbours a secret of the world of forms."

In pencil drawings on semi-transparent drafting paper as well as three-dimensional cardboard constructions, Gisler generates and explores the relationships, at once elementary and highly complex, that arise out of the combinations of angles. Planes and bodies emerge from the interaction of active design and the obedient observation of rules and laws, distinguished by motion and manifesting themselves within it. For Gisler, angles are "mediators between idea and representation." She is enduringly spellbound by the expressive power of the angle to demonstrate relativity and tension. "I am moved by the ends reached by such simple means. I do not create, I merely reveal what is already there, and thus learn something about the world."

Simon Maurer

Die Welttraumforscher

Since 1981, Christian Pfluger (born 1963 in Zurich, resides in Oetwil am See), when not working as cinema programmer and operator, has been part of a protean musical project known as Die Welttraumforscher ("The Space [Dream] Explorers"). Celebrating their 30th anniversary in 2011, Die Welttraumforscher are a mystery: it is unclear whether they "explore the world in a dream, or the dream of the world" (in the words of their first manifesto). Initial production involved a four-track cassette deck; now recordings are made on a home PC. Their means remain modest, but their artistic aspirations are still lofty: over the years Die Welttraumforscher have released 11 cassettes, eight LPs on vinyl, a 7" single and eight CDs, and created scads of music videos, drawings, stories and handbills of their own design.

Pfluger writes the texts, composes the music, draws the covers, designs the sleeves, sometimes even produces the recordings, while simultaneously running his own label, Monif, which he uses to sell most of his productions. On his CDs and in performance he is supported by other musicians.

In the early 1980s Die Welttraumforscher grooved to the proponents of the Neue Deutsche Welle; in the 1990s they discovered the German indie scene, which led to appearances and exhibitions in Germany and Holland. Pfluger's project remains singular, a private world, an experiment in harmony guided by geometry and love.

Michael Hiltbrunner

On 7 January 2011 Die Welttraumforscher play a concert at Helmhaus Zürich.

grünkern

From 1992 to 1998, Ingo Giezendanner (born 1975 in Zurich, resides there still) published a variety of works mainly under the pseudonym “grünkern”, unripe spelt grain. With these “drawn witticisms”, created while he studied graphic design at what is now called the Zurich University of the Arts and engaged in a host of other activities, Giezendanner wanted in his own words “to entertain friends, not to earn money”.

He modelled his drawings on the experimental comics published in Berlin’s *Renate* magazine and the anti-aesthetics of Zurich’s punk fanzine *Alternative*, while looking to the politically motivated autarchy of the alternative movement for the social backdrop to his work. Under the pen-name of grünkern, however, Giezendanner soon developed his own unmistakable drawing style, independent of the aesthetics of the alternative movement, in which his forays into new visual territory were accompanied by narrative experiments. His often cartoon-like stories and fragments focus on the personal, intimate, everyday experiences of a protagonist, revealing in the artist’s words both his own “questing sexuality” and his “delight in the trip”. He frequently collaborated on pieces, publishing some of them in micro-journals sold at cost unofficially and by way of Pablo Gersusa’s fanzine network.

After a while, however, he began to find the grünkern style “too nice, too sweet, too cerebral”. The concept had run its course, and the end of grünkern was the beginning of GRRRR, as Giezendanner signs his work to this day: “In my desperate search for a new production name I got stuck at gr... – or rather GRRRR, with four Rs!”

Michael Hiltbrunner

Medium

Medium is a collective comprising graphic designer Manuel Krebs (born 1970 in Bern, resides in Zurich), artist Shirana Shahbazi (born 1974 in Teheran, resides in Zurich) and curator/critic Tirdad Zolghadr (born 1973 in Teheran, resides in New York City). It is the continuation of *Shahrzad*, a project beginning in 2002 that saw the same trio publish five issues of a magazine of the same name, two special editions, and a book, contribute to various exhibitions and even, according to one website, create “outdoor interventions in the Land Art tradition, often including large animal carcasses doused in rosewater”. Their publications are unified confabulations of typographic design, photography and text in which various positions nevertheless remain discernible. This philosophy of ambivalence, possibly the trademark of their very generation, is here confronted with controversial topics.

The first issue of *Shahrzad* showcased the brand of tea that had given the project its name. For sale in Iran, the tea’s packaging was emblazoned with the portrait of a woman – forbidden following the 1979 revolution, when the representation of unveiled female hair was outlawed.

The manufacturers have since taken to selling the tea with the image blacked out. This sort of deliberate reaction to censorship is key to the artist's book on display at the Helmhaus: the act of censorship is itself – in the case of drawings by Henri Matisse, creatively bowdlerized by one particular functionary – declared a work of art, and hung in the exhibition. *Shahrzad*'s printers in Iran themselves undertook to censor the volume, although they ran a risk by making their adaptation visible in the work as published. A Swiss design and art magazine, on the other hand, was less daring: it cut the slogan “Death to America” from one contribution by *Shahrzad* for fear of upsetting its sponsors.

There followed issues no. 2 (“Oil”) and no. 3 (“The Americas”). In the fourth issue (“Jamaran”), which functioned as a comment on the remake of a showcase from the Imam Khomeini Museum in Teheran, *Shahrzad* itself became the object of censorship at the hands of Iranians in exile, who failed to see the point of according such an “honour” to the leader of the Islamic revolution. Visitors to the exhibition in Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt, however, were treated to a telling commentary on the differences between German and Iranian museum practice. In the fifth issue (“Education”), finally, *Shahrzad*'s creators were subjected to the whims of the editors of publications in connection with documenta 12, held in 2007 in Kassel, and for which they had produced an issue. The editors wrote: “All things considered, of course, you can do whatever you want, as long as we like it.”

For the Helmhaus show, the collective, now under a new name, have created the first issue of their eponymous series, *Medium*, about which they write: “The first compendium addresses contemporary poetry from Barrytown, NY.” So there are some surprises in store, although Manuel Krebs provides some pretty definite information: “backdrop of the issue is the *nidwaldner blitz*, the gazette of canton nidwalden. the volume is printed in 170 x 240 mm format on recycling paper 1/4, cover approx. 170 g/m², contents 80 g/m². on the basis of two variables – page number and print run – we have detected the following: 500 copies on 64 pages.”

Michael Hiltbrunner

The first issue of *Medium* is presented on 18 January 2011 at Helmhaus Zürich.

Bleta Jahaj

Bleta Jahaj (born 1981 in Prishtina, Kosovo; resides in Zurich) studied photography at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

Jahaj's work places photography and objects within the charged space of an installation. The photographs depict sheep living in a house with open windows. The walls of the house had once been painted white. Was it someone's home? There are cracks in the walls and the house looks delapidated. The sheep live here and were probably frightened and confused to suddenly find a human being in their shelter. The human being was also confused and uncertain, and didn't know whether it was okay to disturb the animals, whether fear might be in order: after all, a buck circled the ewes the whole time.

Dark and light met in these sensitive living quarters. There was a fence that looked as if it had grown there, a part of nature. And yet made of wire. How different the sheep looked up close, with their heavy, compact, warm bodies. How different they felt.

The human being took pictures of the sheep, which avoided him until they were certain he meant no harm. They never got completely used to him, however; they obstructed him and tried to escape. But they could not get out of their pen, their prison, and were obliged to put up with the photographer for a time, to get along with him.

Then the human being stepped out of the house. The sky was neutral, the way it is everywhere.

Somewhere else in the world someone was crocheting, a woman: crocheting a blanket. Not the traditional way, with white or beige yarn, sheep's wool, which would stiffen into an ornament, but with rubber thread, black rubber thread. Not a traditional pattern but free form, idiosyncratic inventions full of holes and greatly stretched in places. Every thread in this net had its own function. She left the mistakes untouched, the way they were, cut the thread off. Finally the blanket was mounted in a corner, like a skin, like a hide, capable of taking on a thousand different forms: it was here that it wanted to be stretched out, it was here that it wanted to be hung. Tension and relaxation in a net.

Then she wound the black rubber thread around porcelain objects, around a dish and strange constructions with claws. Oddly inward claws, more defensive than offensive, made for self-defence. She wound the claws into the rubber threads, surrounded them, ensnared them, bound them. Their brilliant whiteness continues to glow from within the black corsage. Ready for use – but restrained.

Finally, a vessel on the floor. A vessel to collect a liquid. A clay pot for fresh milk? Fragile, it is held together by black thread, which takes on and emphasizes its form. The reinforcement would not save it from shattering. And nevertheless it is good to have it there.

Simon Maurer

Cédric Eisenring & Thomas Julier

Cédric Eisenring and Thomas Julier (both born 1983, reside in Lucerne/Zurich and Brig/Zurich, respectively) study at the Zurich University of the Arts and work as artists both individually and as part of various collectives. They deploy a correspondingly wide range of materials and techniques.

The installation *The White Lighting* featured in the exhibition and drawn from the *Icons of Evolution* series comprises some 3500 handcrafted objects made of coloured, translucent, harmless silicon. Created for the show by Eisenring and Julier, the objects are exhibited in a peculiar order, reminiscent of a rhizome, as it were a topography of attraction and repulsion. The handmade objects constitute an artificial, imaginary landscape. For the artists it resembles a fairy-tale clearing in which a prince slays a dragon in order to impress a princess. The trigger for this “proliferation of little balls” was the blood spraying out of the slain dragon – which lends the painstakingly constructed, playful work a gorey subtext.

Visitors can only view the “clearing” from the outside: they are excluded from the perfect White Cube with its portentous charge. The mood of the imaginary landscape is not to be disturbed. The installation is unique in the method of its presentation: after the exhibition, the objects – the embodiment of the fairy tale – are as it were to be “harvested” and never again shown in this form. The harvest, however, will itself provide the starting point for a further chapter in the *Icons of Evolution* – in another form or material.

Michael Haltbrunner

A.C. Kupper

The curators invited artist A.C. Kupper (born 1962, resides in Zurich) to provide the graphic design for the exhibition’s printed matter. As a visual response to *When night is at its darkest comes the day* Kupper selected a self-portrait bearing the title *Ich und Raben* (“I and ravens”). Placed backwards in front of the artist’s head, the ravens deprive viewers of eye contact with the frontally presented subject, who views the world through the ravens’ eyes. His gaze is interrupted by two agents who see the world differently.

The picture is part of Kupper’s new book, published by Edition Patrick Frey of Zurich, to be presented at a vernissage on 22 December 2010. The monograph is a panopticon of eccentric figures, no less than our own contemporaries – not only in the virtual world of Internet and image-editing software, but realer than we might like.

His disturbing blurring of a perception we still believe grants us access to the truth makes Kupper an exemplary subject of his new book. Like a postmodern phenomenologist, he collects images, mainly portraits, from a wide range of sources – the Internet, television, print media, of his own creation – and edits and processes them. The resulting freak show is lent its controversial relevance by the fact that the figures Kupper gives us inhabit the margins of what is “possible”.

Kupper emerges as a master of combinations, mingling hardcore contrasts with subtle transitions. War is also a part of everyday life, gender roles are challenged, and we are pursued by epicene characters: an inscrutable world turned on its head. The artist demonstrates the fine line between being and wanting to be as authenticity and role play become indistinguishable. People live out their dreams with passion, whether in private or, for all to see, on the Net. We are seduced by a world of multiple possibilities. This potential for seduction is lauded as creativity, condemned as perversion. Everyone kicks out the jams – but where are the social boundaries in this game without limits?

Although it might be disdained as a futuristic vision, this is in fact an analysis of our present day. Nor is it the socially marginalized who are acting crazy, but increasingly the members of what Kupper provocatively dubs the “middle class”: the “revolutionary middle class”. What is the origin of this desire to think our way out of the here and now, and into a fantasy world? What makes sects so popular? Why is fine-tuning one's body so alluring? Has the market for attractiveness, as a flight from isolation and loneliness, become so powerful that people no longer care about losing themselves in the process? Is it the revenge of the trash generated by a society thoroughly attuned to consumerism?

Taking up Kupper's book means unwittingly becoming a member of his cabinet of monstrosities: readers are torn between repulsion and attraction as they are driven from page to page. Nor is this world as distant and exclusively American as all that: a Zurich public transit automat suddenly hoves into view, a car bears a Zurich licence plate. Although Kupper does not exclude himself from the cult of mimicry, he finds himself on occasion on the point of tears. Ironic crocodile tears or genuine suffering for his age? In the end, a peculiar calm descends over all of the shrill to-do on parade throughout his book, all of the excess, all of the dancing on the edge of idiocy. A calm we might call melancholy. And Kupper's tears are perhaps those of a present-day pieta.

Simon Maurer

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Events

BOOK VERNISSAGE AND MUSIC IN THE EXHIBITION

Wednesday, 22 December 2010

7 pm Book vernissage

A.C. KUPPER, *Revolutionäre Mittelklasse* (Edition Patrick Frey, Zurich)

8.30 pm Concert, admission: CHF 15

SUDDEN INFANT, noise performance by Joke Lanz (Zurich/Berlin)

FANZINE VERNISSAGE, PERFORMANCES AND CONCERT

Friday, 7 January 2011

7 pm Fanzine vernissage

MACHOVERLAG (Zurich), new fanzines by Francisca Silva

with MH Talaya Schmid, Eva Kurz, Monika Stalder, Peter Hauser and Tika

8.30 pm Performances and concert, admission: CHF 15

MICHAEL BLÄTTLER (Zurich), Random composition using sinus tones

Performances with six cassette decks

MARC MATTER aka VOICEOVER (Cologne), gramophone performance

Vocal collages/sound poetry with gramophones and playback

DIE WELTTRAUMFORSCHER (Zurich), cosmos pop – since 1981

PERIODICAL VERNISSAGE AND MUSIC IN THE EXHIBITION

Tuesday, 18 January 2011

7 pm Periodical vernissage

MEDIUM, new periodical by Manuel Krebs, Shirana Shahbazi

and Tirdad Zolghadr (Zurich/New York)

8.30 pm Concert, admission: CHF 15

OY (Creaked Records), experimentally playful pop by vocalist

and electro-musician Joy Frempong (Zurich)

Exhibition and bar open during events