

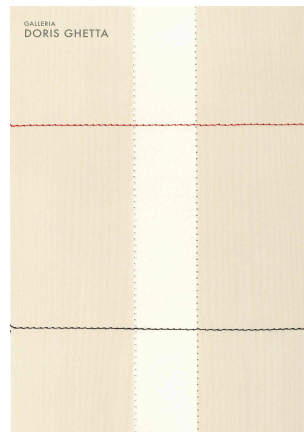
Arnold Holz knecht

possa vester

Opening 27.02.2015, 19h

28.02. – 20.04.2015

Introduction: Matthias Moroder



A brushstroke about two centimetres wide, close to the edge of the canvas, forms a second frame within the painting. A creamy white surface seems to approach the line on all sides. Between the black line and the cream-coloured background, the shadow of untreated canvas. Only to discover that it is actually the other way around: no second colour has been added. Through the weave of the canvas, the oily component of the paint expands to form a shadow on all sides of the line.

We see and understand **Arnold Holz knecht's** work in two separate stages. When we first approach it from a distance, we think we have grasped its layout and colour; and then we look at it close up, and realise that our impressions were wrong as we now see everything in a different light.

Two elements are of use for understanding Arnold Holz knecht's work. On one hand, knowledge of the artist's origins. During his apprenticeship, Holz knecht specialised in ornamental wooden sculpture, and for many years he did restoration work in Munich. The surfaces and techniques of Gothic altars, the trompe l'oeil effects and gold on plaster surfaces, were his daily bread. The other element is an awareness that we are dealing with an artist who is sceptical about representation of reality. It is no chance that we have no catalogue of Arnold Holz knecht's works; it is the result of his diffidence toward all forms of representation of reality. Language, photography, painting and film can only minimally convey a sense of reality, and each of these media leaves room for misunderstandings, deceit, and misinterpretation. And in fact he produces abstract art with practically no figurative references. In clear contrast with this, his techniques poetically recall more traditional, hand-crafted aspects. Oil paint and plaster on wood take us back to the beginnings of painting in the western world.

"Untitled", a wooden board layered with oil paint and graphite, recalls Frank Stella's minimalist aesthetic. Use of oil paints and graphite together is by no means canonical in painting, but is an experiment on the part of the artist. He has cut three vertical lines and three horizontal lines two millimetres thick into the surface, making the intermediate surfaces stand out, like the surface of steel after casting; the deep cuts, which we do not see at first, give the work a particular character, halfway between painting and sculpture. "**Possa vester**", "**Might be**", suggests the exhibition title.

The perfection and the postmodern approach characteristic of Holz knecht's works deceive the onlooker in another way. The works look as if they were produced using ultra-modern techniques and machinery with the aid of digital precision. But this is not the case. Every action, however minimal, owes its extreme perfection to the blade of the scalpel and the artist's firm, experienced hand, creating his works in numerous consecutive stages. Another untitled work looks at first like a series of pink stripes against a white background, with subtle shadows. Are they raised or sunken in the surface? The surface of the wood is first treated with chalk and then smoothed over. The artist then uses the scalpel to cut grooves in the plaster, into which coloured plaster is poured. The surfaces are then smoothed over again. At the upper and lower rims the artist makes tiny cuts and inserts threads, like the coloured threads carpenters

use to draw lines over a long distance. Depending on the observer's position, these create the impression of raised or hollowed out lines.

Another untitled work, probably one of the most technically challenging of Holz knecht's recent works, looks like fish scales, but instead of having an organic shape, the scales become a decoration covering the entire surface. The fields of scales outline the negative space of the plus sign or cross, which stands out because of the difference in the quality of the surfaces. The perfect execution of this work – which would be irremediably compromised by even the slightest smear – not only demonstrates Holz knecht's incredible technical skill but implies something like a superior state of consciousness, almost of meditation ("The first five cuts I make in the morning are the riskiest," the artist comments almost casually).

"Mondlandung" (moon landing), a plaster cast of a head gilded on the inside, must be the result of a similarly meditative process. Rabbit droppings are pinned onto a plaster head, covering it all over like some sort of chain mail. The sculpture "Liegen geblieben" also recalls a suit of armour. A wooden pedestal is surrounded with metal wire, anchored to the wood with V-shaped nails which are in turn welded to the wire. The artist then burnt the base so that only the outer skeleton would remain, which happens to be ideally matched by another, older work of the same size.

This is the manifestation of the opposite of Kracauer's description of ornaments, that is, a mass devouring individual elements. In Holz knecht's work, every single element is a tile in the overall impression, but is so important in its staging that it practically becomes the true subject of the work. In their poetic, meditative dedication to the ornament, Holz knecht's works become instances of resistance against the uniform mass, against calculability, automation and rationalisation.

Victoria Dejaco

ARNOLD HOLZKNECHT, born 1960 in Brixen (BZ), lives and works in Ortisei. Exhibitions (selection): 2014 Gradwanderung, Albert Baumgarten gallery, Freiburg - Abstrakte Impressionen – Museion, Bozen, 2013 1 + 1 with Aron Demetz, Doris Ghetta gallery, St. Ulrich – Grünes Holz, Tubla da Nives, Wolkenstein – 2009 Gefängnis gallery with Walter Moroder, Kaltern 2008 Kunstforum Unterland, Neumarkt.