

Opening **Friday, June 12, 12 pm – 08 pm**
Exhibition **June 12 to July 31, 2020**

The exhibition „Raum im Raum“ presents the work of two very different artists. Ferdinand Dölberg focuses on painting, Georg Vierbuchen on objects. One relies in his work on the subject, the other draws on a confusing outside world

If you look at Dölberg's paintings between 2019 and 2020—a period that was eventful not only in the world at large, but also in his paintings—, you can see an astonishingly quick development. From soft to hard edges, from ornament to outline, from gradient to silhouette.

There currently is the assumption that painting is reinventing itself. Usually it is phrased like this: the internet exists, and painting exists, therefore the latter has to adapt itself. Whether figurative or abstract, the edges have to be clear, it has to be colourful and clean because the paintings need to look pleasant on Instagram. Dölberg refuses this aestheticization. His paintings are too rich in detail anyway, since he uses substances such as chalk, epoxy resin, and he paints over monotypes. Those material conditions would be lost on a phone display.

Dölberg deals with the uniqueness of people, he says, but his figures have strangely rigid faces, much like Japanese theater masks, whose emptiness allows the spectators to empathise more with the characters. The sometimes evasive, sometimes severe gazes have a strange effect: the emotional indeterminacy is alienating only at first glance. After that, the faces become blanks that can be filled. They are so indeterminate, they don't even have a gender. Or, better: they have the potential to depict all genders. The painter calls them non-binary. He takes on the big issue of individuality—a problem for painters throughout the centuries—by not depicting his figures as individuals, but as types. Dölberg tackles the relation of viewer and image, as well as the relations between his figures. The way humans treat each other is another of his concerns. The hand that grips a shoulder can be a friendly approach, full of comfort, but it can also be a menace and a restriction.

Then something else happens in Dölberg's paintings. Lines appear, like the ones in an exercise book. They are faintly visible, just like the letters between the lines. The letter B, in cursive can be glimpsed, and the letter Q, as if someone practised the alphabet before the artist painted over it. The lines reoccur as the signifiers of a system: repetition within a grid, modernity's nightmare. If you practice the letter A a thousand times, you know how it is done. That of course points to repetition as artistic principle which is necessary for a painter's work because in order to learn you must practise. The process entails the danger of standardisation and normalisation, just like in school. At some point, the painting says: „the same thing, over and over.“ The counter-image is the anarchic game, which Dölberg allows his figures, and perhaps the unruly patterns of their costumes too.

„It is all fictional,“ says the painter. He has an interest in placing figures in their own environment. The spaces are restricted, and sometimes they are so crowded that Dölberg's characters overlap on the canvas and in the play of their relations.

And as if the constriction in fictional space wasn't enough, the artist translates the fiction into the gallery space. Sometimes he immures himself, in a room whose outsides hold his paintings, or he encloses himself

in a wooden crate. Usually for the period of an opening, and usually so that people don't see him. Basically though, says Dölberg, anyone can communicate with him via two channels: the images and by talking to the painter in the crate.

The subject in the centre—this is the formula you could use for Dölberg's work, but the artist leaves the middle empty. And yet, he develops his themes beginning with himself. Georg Vierbuchen, the other artist in this exhibition, takes the reverse path. His influences come from the outside. While Dölberg's work is characterised by the expansion of fictional spaces, Georg Vierbuchen above all processes impressions from his environment.

His objects play with kitsch and nostalgia, with the principles of mass and singularity, and they deal with the overproduction of consumer goods. He claims that it is difficult for him to filter exterior stimuli, and that in choosing his subjects indiscrimination plays a major part. To make this disposition productive, Vierbuchen uses an old method: condensation.

Here's an example. In 2019, he produced candles shaped like the Parisian cathedral Notre Dame, whose roof burned in the preceding spring. The candles looked like the souvenirs on sale everywhere in the French capital, but the banal objects get an ironic twist. A church goes up in flames, and people light candles to pray for the refurbishment of the church. In an exhibition, the artist allows the wax to drip on a MacBook white as snow, an unbearable sight for many. One year, maybe six months, or only a few moments contract in a constellation of objects, and you don't need to add anything. All you have to do is condensate to bring out the grotesque and make the joke visible.

In addition to condensation, Vierbuchen uses transformation. When the artist recreates objects in ceramics, and gives them a different color, it is questionable what remains of their essence. They are altered, from the cheap, mass-produced consumer object into a fragile unique piece that is crafted by hand.

How does Vierbuchen pick his objects? The question would be irrelevant if he had hundreds of moulds to select from, he says. To create a handwriting with found objects, that is what he has in mind. This specific vocabulary is heralded by his composite sculptures. Threaded pipes, joints and valves, initially designed to withstand the highest pressure, are reproduced in ceramics, a tender, fragile material. The pieces look utilitarian and stern, and yet their purpose is unclear.

Maybe this pretended utility which hails from a long-gone industrial age is the boiled down essence of kitsch. „How much of it can I stomach, how much can others endure?“ Vierbuchen asks. That, he says, is the interesting thing about his reproductions, but it goes further. Kitsch is, by definition, a mass-produced commodity, that pretends to have its origin in craft, or that fakes a personal and unique character. Vierbuchen reverses the process. He turns the mass-produced things that surround us into unique works. In doing so, he turns to objects that suggest security: poles, that separate the sidewalk from the street, the wheels of rental bikes that promise to carry us swiftly and safely across town, swimming aids for children.

Vierbuchen's objects tell a story of nostalgia and longing, for a past childhood or an innocence, which perhaps never existed, but he doesn't forget about its dark aspects. His recent objects are not linked to a certain time, except to the present. But precisely this makes them the nostalgic objects for the future.

Text: Philipp Hindahl