

**Richard Hawkins**

"Being and its Fetuses:  
New Ceramics"

13 April  
– 28 May 2016

With "Being and its Fetuses: New Ceramics" we are happy to announce the 8th solo exhibition by Richard Hawkins (\*1961, lives in Los Angeles) at Galerie Buchholz.

In a previous comprehensive body of work, Richard Hawkins used the scrapbooks of the legendary Japanese choreographer Tatsumi Hijikata (1928 – 1986) as the point of departure for his collages. Hijikata is known as one of the founders of Butoh dance. In his extensive personal notebooks he wrote about the development of his choreographies and illustrated these notations with images of Western modern art to further articulate the repertoire of gestures he envisioned for Butoh dance. Through this practice, Hijikata produced a subjective and very personal art history in which he addressed the paintings of Western modernism primarily on the basis of their physical and psychological potentials for expression.

For his new body of work, Richard Hawkins takes as his subject Antonin Artaud, with the title "Being and its Fetuses" borrowed from the title of a 1945 Artaud drawing. The French artist, actor, theater director, and writer Antonin Artaud (1896-1948) is a central figure in the European avant-garde and, as Hijikata did for Japanese dance, Artaud famously revolutionized European theater along with theoretical writing on performance. His work was groundbreaking for the development of modern theater. Although it has been the subject of institutional exhibitions, in comparison Artaud's drawing oeuvre was primarily seen as rather inaccessible, and received much less theoretical recognition than his writings and theatrical work.

When Richard Hawkins began his recent research for his new work, he noted that there are still very few attempts in art historical literature to approach the iconography of Artaud's drawings. Richard Hawkins' new ceramic assemblages came into being through intimately looking at Artaud's drawings, and particularly the drawings from the time period between 1944-1946. In these years, Artaud was a patient at a psychiatric hospital in Rodez. The body of drawings by Artaud from that time contains an elaborate and complex iconography featuring many recurring, nearly hieroglyphic elements and forms. Reading Artaud's correspondence from the psychiatric hospital (published posthumously in his notorious "Letters from Rodez") one can understand that these drawings were made expressly for circulation, that Artaud saw them as an accomplished expression of his artistic work, and that he imagined, through the help of friends, to sell these as art works.

For this exhibition, Richard Hawkins has approached these drawings through the physical, manual re-molding or re-forming in clay of Artaud's iconography to gain a point of entry into and understanding about Artaud's formal vocabulary. The muddy, morphological quality of the ceramic material itself, and the tactile sensory perception of this formal language, might not be an insignificant part of the process.

*The drawings that I decided to primarily focus on seem to have all been made in a short burst, January 1945, and then begun again in October of the same year to continue through to April 1946. They are all graphite with a few crayon additions and are all solely linear with very little if any shading. One could classify the line-quality as "confident" and "assured", the penciled lines being continuous and unbroken rather than impeded or sketchy. A large portion of the drawings tend toward the near-symmetricality of religious icons with a central and often larger figure attended by an array of smaller supporting figures. Even to someone who has pored over these drawings many times since their first public reappearance in the mid 1980s, they still seem incredibly noisy and untamed. The individual elements in each drawing may or may not be related so that, as so many writers on these works have done when speaking of them, one tends to rattle off an inventory of them and suggest that – yes, the subjects portrayed seem to be in keeping with the rest of Artaud's work.*

*In trying to discern meaning, or at least, wanting to re-set the terms in which the drawings have traditionally been talked about, I finally settled on pulling individual elements within a drawing out, looking for corresponding elements within the other drawings from this period and attempting to apply what can be known of the context in which they were made to, perhaps, contribute to their meaning. I began to think, frankly, that experiences living relatively untreated in an asylum in Nazi-occupied Paris, the apparent reading of Nerval's works, and the writing of the last chapters of the "Les Tarahumara" may have influenced the drawings more specifically than has been previously thought.*

*One instance – and for me a very productive one – was taking "Le Minotaure" and removing the central dominating figure as well as the more overt of the figurative elements. What are left, as can be seen in my two ceramics "Paper Crypts", are the following elements: a diagram-like pseudo-figure that makes one think of anatomical and acupuncture charts as much as torture racks, operating tables and patients strapped down and submitted to ECT charges; two paired almost-cubist figures, one with breasts and rising from a coffin, the other more abstracted and somewhere between a storage cabinet and a robot, a coffin in the shape of an odalisque à la Magritte (though Magritte's earliest works in this vein date from four years later) but with linear paths buzzing - like flies - from its interior and, lastly, what seems to be a mechanomorphic face – flat, blank and transparent. Five other elements bear much less of a relationship to the human figure and take the form, instead, of sealed envelopes and folding tables with legs closed, extending and fully extended. The final element, almost minor in comparison to the more identifiable and usually larger elements, is a quiet little drawing, no more than ten pencil lines and stained with rubbed-in blue and brown crayon, and indicates a shape that is both envelope and coffin. By cracking off elements from the rest of the drawings and focusing on this very small seemingly minor one, a new connection within Artaud's iconography occurs from all the way back to his writings on the Black Plague through the gris-gris spells and all the way up to his use of coffins in drawings from January through March 1946. If one imagines that the spells were meant to carry within them a shock upon first sight, and it is only the reading of them by the recipient that allows the spell or curse to take full effect, then the envelope that contains them should preferably not reveal too much of their contents. Combine this with the convention of coffins not only housing corpses but also suppressing contagion and you have an interesting correspondence: the envelope is to the curse what the coffin is to the plague-ridden corpse.*

R.H., 2016