

Meyer Riegger

Horst Antes

12 November – 23 December 2022

Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe

Horst Antes (born 1936) is one of post-war Modernism's most important figurative painters and sculptors. In its first exhibition with the artist, Meyer Riegger is showing a selection of the house paintings that Antes has been dedicating himself to since the 1980s. On show will be works from the series' beginnings up until the present day.

Antes's art is eclectic and comprises painting, prints and illustrations, as well as sculptures and ceramics. Influenced by artists such as HAP Grieshaber and the Dutch-American painter Willem de Kooning, he has developed a unique visual language: abstract symbolic figures of people and animals, and geometrically shaped houses without windows and doors. A motif that won him international renown in the early 1960s was that of the cephalopod as a metaphor and abstracted chiffre of the human being.

In addition to the cephalopods, Antes turned to new motifs in the early 1980s —buildings and architecture. The windowless, doorless buildings formed the central figures, distinguished by the artist from the background via their reduced geometric form and dense, solid fields of colour. This method of painting pursues a path laid by the minimalist, expressionist style of the Russian-German painter Alexei von Jawlensky, characterized by its strong use of colour and simple lines. The works of the early 80s often depicted dark tones, with buildings painted in black colours seemingly sinking into their darker backgrounds while the colours of the paintings' roofs are typically dark blue, reflecting the light of the sky like a mirror. The artist also created buildings in brighter colours such as red, pink and white. The undersides of the abstract houses are often rooted firmly into the ground, while the roofs are connected to the sky. Some of the buildings resemble open boxes, with others revealing a closed form. Other works go beyond the depiction of individual buildings to show groups of houses and even figure-like villages, formed irregularly or according to rules. As with the cephalopods, the houses bear an allegorical significance: a constrained, closed building symbolizes the space in which humanity exists, but that same house also acts as a symbol for the human being, its existence and loneliness and individuality, its position vis-à-vis others and the collective.

Antes has, since the early '90s, been working on what he calls "Zeitraumbilder" ["timescale paintings"]. The fronts of these images bear numbers and timescales that together make up their titles, while also counting the days and hours that the artist spent painting the work. In some of the pieces, a certain timeframe – comprised of information on the day, month and year – has deliberately been rendered illegible in that dates have been layered on top of one another. The rear of each painting bears a complete list of the days Antes spent working on it, typically alongside the corresponding month and year. One interpretation of the "timescale paintings" is that they aim to take the transience of time and document it, fixing it onto a canvas.

Humanity, existence, society, time: these are the subjects that still today remain central in Horst Antes's work.

Text: Erchen Wang