

# KÖLNISCHER KUNSTVEREIN

Darren Bader

*The World as Will and Representation*

Opening 27.2.2015, 7 pm

Exhibition: 6.2.–22.03.2015

In Darren Bader's first institutional solo exhibition in Europe, everything seems different than expected: Not only does the show at the Kölnischer Kunstverein bear three titles, beginning on February 6, but it doesn't officially open until the 27th of the same month. The exhibits also give the impression that they are difficult to grasp. Thus, Bader plans to present some of his works from week to week in different areas inside or outside the building. Others will only be part of the exhibition for a short time.

But it is not only the form and sequence of the exhibition that defy the supposed parameters of the exhibition. The 31 works planned for the show - including sound works, films, text works, objects and installations - also promise some surprises. For instance, Bader's works usually correspond only to a small extent to the common notion of what a work of art is. This is only marginally due to the fact that in many of his works Bader refers back to the now more than a century old tradition of the readymade principle founded by Marcel Duchamp and declares everyday objects to be art. Of central importance in this context is rather the aspect of how Darren Bader employs the aforementioned idea and what implications are associated with the works. Many works are associated with certain conditions, tasks and challenges that define how the respective object is to be handled. In contrast to his French colleague, Bader thus integrates the recipient much more strongly into his works. In the enticing sounding work *Pretty Face*, which like all of the artist's works is undated, each visitor determines individually what constitutes a "beautiful face". The artistic contribution thus lies solely in the definition of the framework, while the recipient has the task of making a choice. Depending on the visitor, the freestyle can thus be performed differently or not at all.

Questions of authorship, as evoked in *Pretty Face*, also characterize works such as *To Have and to Hold - object J1*, in which the - mostly optional - tasks and possibilities of the owner are brought to bear even more clearly: The work is based on the idea that the owner of the work acquires a book of Candida Höfer's photographs of On Kawara's date images, studies it for a year, collects further copies of the publication for as long as desired, and finally introduces them into the everyday life of other people. The manifestation of the work is thus by no means static, but - depending on the collector - in a constant process.

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A different form of dealing with questions of authorship is also evident in the work *110 x 5 x 166.5 cm*, which is a photograph of a boy in the dimensions given. In order to realize this work, Bader did not work as a photographer, but bought the work of a colleague, which he subsequently passed off as his own creation, thereby re-declaring the photographic work as a sculpture. Inevitably, this act not only demonstrates a critical examination of the mechanisms of the art market, but also a shrewd investigation of when and how something becomes a work.

The thoughts reflected in the works mentioned go far beyond the classical conceptual art with which Darren Bader's work is repeatedly related. Especially the moments of the absurd, which can be traced in many of the pieces, represent a clear distinguishing feature from the art movement founded in the 1960s. The absurd and ludicrous nature of some of the works rather points in the direction of Surrealism, which becomes recognizable as an important influence in the course of a more intensive examination of Bader's practice. This circumstance is particularly evident in a group of works for which Bader combines opposing objects, concepts and thoughts to form pairs, thus referring back to a strategy formulated by the French avant-garde movement at the beginning of the 20th century. In the context of the exhibition, this group includes *perfume with/and trapezoid*, *pair of jeans and/with \$228*, *patella with/and theater tickets*, *sugar and/with axe* as well as *glasses with/and glasses*, for which any number of representatives of the various objects can potentially be used. The everydayness of the objects used makes it possible to discern a strong difference to the works of Surrealism, as they were usually conceived more clearly than works of art.

The fact that Bader uses found objects for the majority of his works makes it difficult in many cases to capture objects with certainty as exhibits. This factor therefore also gives an idea of the endeavour to sound out the boundaries between art and non-art and, if necessary, to dissolve them completely. At the Kölnischer Kunstverein, the American artist takes the aforementioned ambitions to the extreme with works such as *person sitting in passenger seat of car*, for which at certain times - as the English term implies - someone sits in the passenger seat of a car in front of the exhibition house. Without the knowledge of the work, one would thus inevitably overlook the work of art and perceive the scenery - if at all - as an everyday situation.

If *person sitting in passenger seat of car* is a successful balancing act between the visibility and invisibility of a work, Bader pursues completely different goals with the film *OSS*, which was produced especially for the Kölnischer Kunstverein. Darren Bader wrote the screenplay for the

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animated science fiction film, which is about a whimsical and comical competition at the United Nations, in which the proposal to build sculptures for space is drawn by lot. In keeping with the bizarre traits of his other works, his cosmic works are also somewhat strange, as they include a football stadium, thousands of cubes of frozen cow's milk or a gigantic human hand that will be sent into space in the distant future. With *OSS*, Darren Bader thus offers an absurd theatre that can be located somewhere between a fantastic vision of the future, belief in the unlimited possibilities of art and over-ambitious art films. At the same time, with *OSS* he expands the spectrum of his artistic practice, the complexity of which one has hardly been able to master up to now anyway.

In addition to *OSS*, the sound work audio files, also produced especially for the Kölischer Kunstverein, opens up new categories within Darren Bader's oeuvre: On 32 loudspeakers, Bader presents almost simultaneously hundreds of pieces of music relating to the Old Testament, his credit card number, Hegel's dialectic, noble gases or the ingredients of a Linzer Torte, among other things. The result of this unusual interplay is a deafening roar that turns the recipient's head with immense force and perhaps gives an inkling of the noise that arises when Darren Bader, with a great deal of humour, brings down the boundary walls between Conceptual Art, Surrealism and other art forms.