

Melancholy, yearning, wanderlust, homesickness, solitude: these fundamental atmospheric components – consistently accompanied by subtle irony – pervade the installations, paintings, sculptures, films and collages of the Los Angeles-based artist Friedrich Kunath (born 1974 in Chemnitz) who studied at Braunschweig University of Art under Walter Dahn.

Kunath deploys motifs from the store of popular culture ranging from billboards of the nineteen seventies to the drawings of Mordillo as well as icons of art history in his works: In a contemporary interpretation of Caspar David Friedrich's famous oil painting "The Monk by the Sea" (circa 1810), he accordingly sets up his bed on the beach in order to nostalgically gaze off into the blue depths (untitled, 2006, C-Print). In another work, he sketches a mystic head after Jawlensky that is enthroned over a desperately bustling assemblage of people in groups drawn in various styles and wipes away a tear from the corner of its eye (untitled, 2009, acrylics on paper). Borrowings from the history of art can also be found in his installations when Kunath, for example, has a flock of birds formed out of shoelaces soar from a pair of abandoned shoes (untitled, 2009, installation)! in a playfully vague reminiscence of Goya's famous etching "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" (1796/97).

Friedrich Kunath's choice of a cartoon-like style for the figures standing next to each other in individual scenes of his large-format wall and canvas pictures already underscores a melancholy elusiveness that adheres to the captured moments and scenes: Unlike fairy tales or comics, cartoons very precisely outline an entertaining story in just a few images, the attraction of which largely consists of the invitation to schadenfreude. Kunath undermines this schadenfreude when he exaggerates his bustling figures in a grotesque, Dada-like manner, stabs merry snowmen with the neighbor's carrots or forces unsuspecting travelers into awkward situations of the primal fear of solitude. While these scenes might appear as seemingly harmless examples of slapstick and blundering buffoonery, a dark dreamy and romantic melancholy emerges from behind the fragmentary narratives that are less concealed by the ostensible lightness than underscored by it instead.

Friedrich Kunath's humor is consistently accompanied by a cryptic irony that points to collective sore spots with a mischievous smile. He unerringly plays with aspects of youthful flights of fancy in his works. His pieces simulate great tragic gestures, the self-sacrificing hero's death, with such pathos that the simple naivety and triviality of these romantic fantasies wrests a partly nostalgic, partly shamed smile from the viewer. At the same moment in which the works' inherent yearning threatens to spill over onto the viewer, Kunath makes fun of this reaction.

The exhibition is presented as a dense weave of sculptures, paintings and installations conceived specifically for the spaces in the Kunstverein. Accordingly, Kunath covers the walls and ceiling of an entire room with a patchwork comprising various jeans materials like wallpaper that takes up the motif of a coffin likewise covered with a jeans fabric.

Jeans as the epitome of everyday fabrics that stands for notions such as rebellion, freedom and youth, at the same time evoking dubious fashion choices of the nineteen eighties and nineties (carrot jeans, jeans shirt) are thus linked with the memento mori of inevitable finiteness, death. Along with the fabric and canvas works that are hung on the jeans wallpaper or stretched through the room, the atmosphere of the space transformed into a kind of fabric cave veers between a childish retreat and a melancholy reverie on past times.

Kunath evokes a similarly nostalgic undertone in “Gescheiterte Hoffnung” (“dashed hope”) for which he installed a collapsed house in the spaces of the Kunstverein. While it seems to reference the sheets of ice stacked on top of each other in Caspar David Friedrich’s “Sea of ice,” in terms of form, the remnants of wallpaper and pictures on the two still partly standing walls, the assemblage of souvenirs, scurrilous objects and groups of sculptures that can be discovered between the debris tell the story of the loss of a constructed idyll.

The exhibition title “Home wasn’t built in a day” recalls the factual attempt to fashion a physical place into a center of one’s life as well as a reference to a mental home: The construction of a self image formed and assessed according to one’s own experiences of the criteria of familiar characters. Kunath works this potentially weighty approach with somnambulistic lightness, constructing from it a spotted tragicomical world.

*(This document was automatically generated by Contemporary Art Library.)*