

Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers are delighted to present an exhibition with new works by George Condo. At the opening of the gallery in Berlin in October 2008, large-format drawings by the artist were displayed in the cabinet on the upper floor. Now with the exhibition 'Family Portraits', Condo is continuing the discourse on the figurative element in painting, which is one of the fundamental aspects in the artist's oeuvre.

George Condo, who already in 1984 had his first solo exhibition at the Monika Sprüth Galerie in Cologne, resided at the beginning of the 1980s for an extended period in Cologne and moved within the context of the 'Jungen Wilden'. The style of this group of young painters, to which such artists as Walter Dahn and Jiri Dokupil belonged, was typified by an emphatically painterly and expressive character which deliberately distanced itself from the artistic movements in vogue at that time, such as Minimalism and Concept Art. Whereas artists who practiced painting wished to free themselves from the notion of art which was esteemed at that time, unconventional art forms such as graffiti and comic simultaneously entered into the formal repertoire. The repudiation of a historical or genre-specific hierarchy continues to characterize the oeuvre of George Condo right up to today: the pictorial language of painting from Velázquez to Picasso enters into a symbiosis with the aesthetic of the modern comic book and of everyday visual culture. There are not, however, any direct pictorial quotations or discovered and appropriated motifs to be found here; instead, Condo connects formal references and subjects into a new pictorial sphere, so that an art-historical aspect shines through the presence of a contemporary visual world.

The portrait as a classical pictorial genre functions in Condo's works as a commentary upon the history of painting and simultaneously as a mirror of our own era. Through the utilization of light and shadow, which recalls classical chiaroscuro, Condo draws forth from the dark, almost black background the countenance of the grotesque-beautiful 'Smiling Girl' (2009) or the lugubrious shape in the work 'Silent Thoughts' (2009). The figures, which are to some extent composed of geometric forms, look like hideous creatures with their gaping mouths and bulging eyes, and they summon up associations with ventriloquists' puppets. At the same time the paintings, executed in the virtuoso manner of the old masters, take on a melancholic and abstracted appearance.

The large-format works of the exhibition such as 'The Fallen Butler' (2009) or 'Central Park' (2009), combine figures, fragments of faces and abstract forms into an intricate pattern juxtaposed on the pictorial surface. The temporal aspect indicated by the titles becomes an element of the paintings. The narrative element, however, does not serve to describe a specific occurrence, but instead complements the depiction of complex factors and constellations. Inasmuch as Condo coaxes an irritated smile from the viewer with his humorous and grotesque mode of representation,

he places at our disposal the manner in which we perceive experienced reality.

Whereas the current era is characterized by an intensive examination of the past, i.e. of history and its reception, it is influenced at the same time by an environment which is constantly increasing in speed and complexity. In his oeuvre, George Condo expresses an awareness of the history of images and the phenomena of our times. His paintings, along with his sculptures and drawings, evince a characteristic which maintains a delicate equilibrium between the sublimity of the work of art on the one hand, and the aspects of comicality, grotesqueness and distortion on the other.

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