

*Kaspar Müller in conversation with Fabrice Stroun and Tenzing Barshee*

*Fabrice Stroun & Tenzing Barshee:* What's with the naked women flashing their breasts painted in the style of British artist Julian Opie at the entrance? It's quite an aggressive way of greeting visitors to the Kunsthalle. How do you expect us to look at them?

*Kaspar Müller:* They aren't just 'in the style' of Julian Opie, these are his actual motifs, which I've digitized from reproductions, cropped, and silkscreened on canvas before sticking a few diamonds to their surface. What interests me in Julian Opie's pictorial language is that it is as ubiquitous as it is explicit. They are pictograms; the 'before-and-after' woman flashing her breast looks like an airport security animation. Their explicitness is proportionate to their degree of abstraction: flat primary colors, an unvarying black outline, etc.

*FS & TB:* You are not really suggesting that we should look at them as pure abstractions, are you?

*KM:* Of course not, that would be impossible. These images are problematic on so many levels. Some pay their dues to famous art history nudes. For example, the woman on the blue background clearly brings to mind Marcel Duchamp's famous *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*. But what makes these images disturbing cannot be reduced to their sexual subject alone. What's brutal is the way this abstract black line simultaneously neutralizes and amplifies their content. The effect is so evident, so brash...

*FS & TB:* Are you talking about Julian Opie's work or yours?

*KM:* Well, mine of course. I believe my process of appropriation and customization has not dimmed the iconic intensity of Opie's original pictures. These works – and the whole exhibition – attempt to negotiate an impossible truce between abstraction and representation. With abstraction comes language and knowledge. With figurative representation comes empathy, desire, rejection. Between these two points, a lot of room is left for interpretation and misunderstandings.

*FS & TB:* Do you see yourself as a satirist? What function, if any, do you ascribe to the deadpan humor that permeates your work?

*KM:* The humor is basically mechanical: it's the laughter provoked by watching something break down. I'm interested in heightening the failures that are intrinsically part of any system of representation. There is an implicit absurdity in the positions artists assume to make up for these

malfunctions. It's like watching someone slip and pretending nothing happened.

*FS & TB:* Some may see this program of disenchantment as cynical.

*KM:* It's just the opposite. There is nothing more cynical than to see people in front of magic tricks and falling for it. Humor needs to be a bit mean to be funny. Life is full of situations ripe for mean humor: compulsive repetitions, failures, unfulfilled desires, misunderstandings, etc. I think that for a lot of people, the experience of disillusionment is mistakenly perceived as cynicism. I find there is a particular beauty to it.

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