

Armes System. Hallo Mädels!
Nov 15 – Dec 14, 2024

Thursday – Friday
12 – 6 pm
Saturday 12 – 3 pm

CONRADI
Admiralitätstraße 71
20459 Hamburg
+49 (0)40 469 66645

galerie-conradi.de

Michael Deistler
Max Schulze
& Materials by
KP Brehmer
Achim Duchow
Astrid Heibach
Georg Herold
Norbert Hinterberger
Albert Oehlen
Angelika Oehms
Frauke Wiegmann

This exhibition combines a series of ballpoint pen drawings and photographs by Michael Deistler from between 1978 and 1985 with recent pictures by Max Schulze. It is rounded out by publications, films, and rarely seen pieces from members of Deistler's generation on view in several display cases. Deistler and Schulze steer clear of any sort of phony harmony. Foul and strong language, the imitation of painful awkwardness ... about as embarrassing as the rear shelves of middle-class cars in the 1980s, or, because there are no rear shelves anymore today—more transhistorically speaking—as embarrassing as a “sad sack,” an ill-starred (male) character who stocks up at the hardware store to prepare for potential crises. “Life is full of Obi moments,” as the DIY superstore chain's advertising has it. Vacuous phrases, rote morality with a cultural veneer, poorly repressed, bad conscience, shame, boastfulness, all that is evil, bruised, and darkly inscrutable. The sacred gravitas of art, the dignity of what is at issue, here appears, in hardly dignified yet titular form, as a “poor system” ... which, to add insult to injury, is paired with a brisk “Hey ladies.” One of the two postcards inviting the public to the double exhibition shows a German turnip field from a picture by Neo Rauch with a Humpty Dumpty waving the German flag pasted over it. Revulsion, self-hatred, vicarious embarrassment, and caustic irony, time-tested devices that let art speak at all to the society in which we live (society as art's other and, conversely—as its abyss). Deistler's works need to be seen in the context of a generation of artists who responded to the mechanisms of collective repression prevalent in 1980s West Germany, which was single-mindedly focused on what was billed as economic recovery, with a visual language that can sometimes seem disconcerting today. The recent electoral successes of the extreme right in Germany and elsewhere and a fundamental crisis of moderate conservatism, which has opened the door to a normalizing discursive shift extending deep into mainstream society, endow these pictures with a discomforting contemporary relevance. Deistler and Schulze do not propose to develop sociopolitical discourses. Still, the artists invite controversy. The aggressiveness of their statements contrasts with the ornamental quality of their work; the fictional is amalgamated with the personal, even confessional, and public expressions of opinion. They raise questions about their own values, limits, and taboos.

Michael Deistler (b. 1949) studied at the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HFBK) in Hamburg; Sigmar Polke was among his teachers. In 1980, Deistler won a DAAD fellowship. He went to Egypt, where he added to his growing oeuvre of drawings and photographs. Ballpoint pen on DIN A4-size paper and handmade black-and-white prints are his media.

Traveling the North African country, Deistler discovers relics of the German North African campaign in the early 1940s, including numerous swastika ornaments. With almost manic devotion, he reworks the swastika symbol into an unending series of new patterns, which he combines with provocative statements. The structures and text pictures are reminiscent of mosaics, carpets, or the aesthetic of broadcast teletext. And he does not shy away from slogans drawn from the linguistic inventory of the Third Reich. Demonstratively affirming the shocking symbol, employing it in an excruciating repetition that will tax the patience even of well-disposed beholders, the artist labors to defy the repression and prohibitions shoring up the universal silence over Nazi ideology.

This is the point that the camouflage paintings in Max Schulze's series *Der Wunsch zu verschwinden* (*Camopedia*) home in on. They are based on the forty-three tones of “Alpine Feine Farben,” a range of colors sold by a leading manufacturer of wall paints. *Elfenbein-Rebellin—Zurückhaltendes Pastellgelb* or *Leiser Moment—Graziles Graulila*: in the suggestive names of the colors with the accompanying product descriptions, Schulze appropriates the lifestyle of commodified individuality for his works on canvas, adding to the nagging sense of willful banality with motifs drawn exclusively from the repertory of military camouflage patterns. *Kokette Sinnlichkeit—kräftiges Puderrosa* meets the “oak-leaf pattern” developed by the Waffen SS.

Max Schulze (b. 1977) studied at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts and graduated from Jörg Immendorff's master class in 2005. Many years ago, he established the “Archiv Untergrund,” collecting and studying visual productions neglected by the mainstream from the 1960s to the present. His imprint of the same name publishes positions that catch his attention in the course of his research.