

In “KREBBER” we show a group of works Michael Krebber painted between 1990 and 2001.

In the late 1980s, we knew of almost no Krebber paintings except for the “*Baselitz*”. Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel in front of the shattered piano and George Simenon in a white dinner jacket, exhibited at our Galerie Christoph Dürr in Munich, Daniel Buren stripes and Allan McCollum surrogates on photocopies at Isabella Kacprzak’s gallery in Stuttgart, all back-door escape routes, away from painting. Only the exhibition at Birgit Küng’s place in “*Fettstrasse*” produced – after Cosima von Bonin literally did not allow her husband to leave the studio – five small, magical paintings that, in a cloak-and-dagger operation, were brought to Gstaad, where they were swiftly purchased by T. A. and then exhibited in Zurich.

After that, I immediately offered Krebber a solo exhibition at the art fair in Chicago (1991), under the condition that he produce 10 new paintings. The back doors were closed, but it seemed several windows were still standing open. For an exhibition at K-Raum Daxer in Munich, Cosima von Bonin made a horse out of styrofoam and plastic wrap. Krebber showed an excellent, large diptych with a woman's portrait. He asked CvB to show the horse – an unlimited edition – at his booth in Chicago. If the first painting of the new series still showed a gestural relationship to the horse’s head, the ones that followed were all painted more or less monochromatically, culminating in the two last paintings, so that these last two works were two completely empty white canvases. An offset graphic was added to this, and the booth was finished. Astonishingly, 80% of the booth was sold two hours before the opening.

Krebber’s paintings from the 1990s and early 2000s form a counterpoint to a kind of archaeology of modern art as practiced by artists like Sigmar Polke, Albert Oehlen or Martin Kippenberger – artists fond of incorporating historical references in their paintings humorously, as a kind of artist joke. Unlike his colleagues, Krebber almost never used words on his canvases during this period, but keeps it to painting with his diminishingly fragmented, “implied” (in the best sense of the word) visual quotes. This is ultimately the mark of Krebber’s work, which John Kelsey once aptly described as “unfinished too soon.”

Completed in 2000, the five 90 x 75 cm canvases titled *P*, *O*, *L*, *K* and *E* consist largely of monochrome pink, green and brown layers of paint that appear to have been painted over something else. Only the fragment of a Polke-trace is visible on one corner; the brown canvas has been slit, showing nothing behind it but stretcher bars and wall. The green of the center painting – “*L*” – is emblazoned with a red emblem reminiscent of a brand mark.

Krebber does not negate his predecessors; he strips them away. He has, in these post-Reunification years, quasi “unpainted” his Cologne environment, perhaps even his era. This is his work. Painting after Krebber could, in that respect, – and I say this without irony – be incredibly difficult.

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