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Demian Kern

Offspring

14.03. – 23.04.2025

The *Offspring* is here.

A doctor, an egghead, a cat, a construction worker, a chocolate bunny, a fireman and Snow White (in the office).

For his second solo exhibition at Galerie Krobath, Demian Kern returns to the title-giving motif of his last exhibition *Collectibles*, but this time the collectible figures are no longer portrayed in painting but staged photographically and presented framed in a reflective Plexiglas passe-partout.

Modalities of image production at the interface between painting and photography are further examined. Landscape painters of the 18th century used black mirrors (Claude glasses), named after Claude Lorrain, as an aid (filter) to reduce tonal qualities and enhance contrasts. Kern now integrates black mirrored Plexiglas as a passe-partout for his photographs to bring the immediate surroundings of their presentation into the picture.

Instead of the white neutral painting background, which (similar to a digital screen) made the shadow projections of the Swarovski figures appear in an indefinable space, the new, nasty grinning *Collectibles* now appear in macro perspective in a photo studio. The figures and their surrounding space in the photographs blur, while we, the viewers, and the surrounding gallery space emerge more sharply from the gray-toned reflection. This supposedly inclusive space quickly becomes exclusive – the excess of information leads to a destabilization of focus, proximity and distance. While we encounter the object in close-up, we glide through the mirrored passe-partout and recognize ourselves at a double distance. In this way, we either look at our deformed self or the creature in the picture - focusing on both at the same time is impossible.

In contrast to the transparent glass figurines from the paintings, which exclusively represent the animal world and correspond to the paradoxical idea of untouchable nature through their rigid, fragile materiality – a different, much more haptic reality enters the picture with the figure of Snow White and the flexibly rotating spherical heads, the violin-playing chocolate bunny, etc.

Primarily aimed at children, the new anthropomorphic collectible objects shown in *Offspring* embody aspects of cultural life. In the case of the *Kinder Surprise Egg* spherical head figures, their own reification is also implied – as they often have a double vocation: profession/discipline, object/activity, food/dish (such as the egghead). They seem to serve an educational purpose, perhaps also evoking a blending of gender/professional roles. They are not only collectible figures but also movable, exchangeable, and reconfigurable play figures. This latter feature presents the greatest contrast to the Swarovski figures,

whose toy-like appearance sublimates the longing of adults for childish play with high-quality materials that are far too delicate and fragile for such play.

With *Offspring*, Kern continues his theme-based exploration of mass-produced collectibles, their subtle distinctions in relation to ideas of “taste” and “cuteness”, as well as the adult gaze on toy-like objects. In Adulthood, there is something grotesque about the childhood fantasy of the animate object; it becomes uncanny. Through the macro perspective, this very fantasy is evoked – the closer the lens gets to the object, the more animated it appears, and its model-like character disappears.

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Lucie Pia

Demian Kern(*1990 Bietigheim-Bissingen, DE) currently lives and works in Vienna. He has been studying at Art Center Pasedena and Berlin Weissensee. Kern has had recent exhibitons at Marble, Brussels; Galerie Krobath, Vienna; Schleuse, Vienna; Alienze, Vienna; Callirrhoë, Athens.