

## CHRISTIAN MAYER

flotsam and jetsam

Opening, Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, 7 pm  
 Exhibition from 20<sup>th</sup> of June until 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2007  
 Finissage, Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2007

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**Delicious monster**

*It is unfortunate that only after we have spent much time in the collection of material in a somewhat random fashion at the suggestion of an idea lying hidden in our minds, and after we have indeed over a long period assembled the material in a merely technical manner, does it first become possible for us to discern the idea in a clearer light and to devise a whole architectonically in accordance with the ends of reason. Our diverse modes of knowledge must not be permitted to be a mere rhapsody, but must form ... a unity of manifold modes ... under one idea. The unity of the end to which all the parts relate and in the idea of which they all stand in a relation to one another, makes it possible to determine from our knowledge of the other parts whether any part is missing, and to prevent any arbitrary addition.*

*If I abstract from all content,.. all knowledge, subjectively regarded, is either historical or rational.[...] However a mode of knowledge may originally be given, it is still, in relation to the individual who possesses it, simply historical, if he knows only so much of it as has been given to him from outside, ... whether through immediate knowledge or narration. [...] He has formed his mind on another's, and the imitative faculty is not itself productive. Philosophy [by contrast,] can never be learnt, save only in a historical fashion. Modes of rational knowledge ... can be so entitled ... only when they have been derived ... from principles - the sources of which may... even [be] the rejection of what has been learnt. On this view, philosophy is the science of the relation of all knowledge to the essential ends of human reason - a mere idea of a possible science that nowhere exists in concreto - and the philosopher is not an artificer in the field of reason but himself the lawgiver of human reason.*

From Kant's *The Architectonics of Pure Reason*

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The most unique characteristic of the artwork of our times is that it is no longer defined as creation ex nihil. Art-making is based, instead, on 'cutting and pasting', as it were: The artist amasses together a diversity of objects, sounds, abstract ideas, static and dynamic visual imagery etc., combining these 'parts' into new 'wholes'. The works obtained in this manner are thus *constructions* or *syntheses* and viewers must consider them in the same terms: They must project thereon a structure of 'cut and paste', namely, discover therein a diversity of distinct and independently existing sources, combined together as one.

Superficially, the description seems to fit earlier methods of modern art - collages, assisted readymades, assemblages pastiches and bricolages. This time around, though, the logic of cut and paste reigns supreme. The 2-d collage is a non-organic work of painting but a painting nevertheless - a painting that embodies a critique of the organic conception of painting; in order to be understood as such the viewer must project on the collage a prior painterly order and observe how the separately identifiable parts combine, nevertheless, to a masterful whole. The same applies to assemblage sculptures; the latter are non-organic sculptures but sculptures all the same and, arguably, so are works of art that present themselves as assisted readymades. The philosophical art of our own times, by contrast, requires no such prior projections. The cut'n'paste work must be understood *primarily* as a network of sources that underwent synthesis in virtue of unexpected or *creative* categories that express a hidden unity in the parts.

The *historical* works of our age, to use Kant's terms, might satisfy, superficially, the aforementioned description; they, too, might be made as amalgamations of diverse sources. In that case, though, the unity of the artistic whole may only reflect a confluence of incidental and personal factors related to their artist-producer - the will of the maker to hold them together as unity. Without a unifying concept, the artworks of the former type - which in the present day and age we call

*expressionist* - require the viewer to conjure up a presence of *someone* who combined the sources together - an artist, whose somewhat arbitrary efforts occasioned in the viewer a sense of joy.

The unity of the sources of philosophical or *conceptual* artwork, to repeat, expresses hidden connections. Artificial and creative as his constructions might be, the philosophical artist does not need to posit himself as the principle behind the unity of his artworks but assign that role to the hidden codes he unearthed, instead. Rather than attempting to combine diverse sources into an arbitrary but pleasing whole, he aims to subject them to a new synthesis.

It should be stated at the outset that philosophical works are not restricted only to objective qualities; being engaged in a search for new categories, which have the potential to shed new light on the sources, it is often advisable for philosophical artists to pay keen attention to neglected or overlooked aspects thereof, which manifest themselves in their subjective impact. In the first instance, these connections hold between items that float together in the stream of consciousness of an individual; accordingly, we may call these items *flotsam*.

It is far from true, moreover, that philosophical art is required, by nature, to restrict itself to synthesis of *immaterial* ideas. In so far as objects are analyzed, classified into various categories and made parts of a collection, they are not treated as mere matter but invested with intellectual labor and, by implication, become elements of the stream of consciousness, too. Anyone with a keen eye for collectibles is well aware of these qualities even in the absence of the original collector who raised them above their humble material status. He can see that the objects once floated in an individual stream of consciousness and at one point became invested with aura and charisma that separated them from other objects alike in every other regard. He can see their breeding even when finds them salvaged on the shore, bereft of their owner, and calls them *jetsam*.

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Speakers of the German language undoubtedly know how Herr Biedermeier - a proverbial great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather - left the smoldering and eerily silent battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars to return home, tired and demoralized, determined to end an epic chapter of his life, marked by war, history and politics, swearing the next one, awaiting him, will be dedicated solely to quiet, safe and inwardly centered existence.

"If only life were that simple", he said to himself a while later, perched comfortably on a rosewood armchair, staring at the newly installed wallpaper that covered the entire living room, providing a vivid backdrop for a multitude of armchairs, side-tables, standing-lamps, sofas and a mahogany card table with four matching chairs. Recent advances in printing technology allowed him and a limited number of others to project on their walls a shadowy bird's eye view of a foreign shore, importing into their dark inner sanctums the likeness of a lush tropical jungle of Brazil,

"If silence and inner peace is what I truly wanted", Herr Biedermeier wondered silently, why did I bring into my living-room a roaring exotic scene with strange colorful birds whose crowing sounds are forever associated in my mind with the sour scent of gunpowder?" The bemused eyes softened as they began zooming into the large image; exploring purposefully, as if by a will of their own, until they rested on a small group of dark lightly-clad males and females who performed their daily chores. Diving deeper into the scene, the entire field of vision was finally occupied by a single member of the crowd - a lovely girl, reclining low, seemingly looking at herself reflected on a shiny surface of a table pushed against the wall.

The focus of attention shifted abruptly, claimed by a series of sharp audible impressions emanating from a cage with a pair of pale yellow canaries. The sounds always triggered in his mind the same thought: "Emperor Franz himself has a pair of these birds!" The loving couple was awakened from slumber by a hand-shaped Monstera Deliciosa leaf from a potted plant near the window that briefly entered their cage after it was set into motion by the second leafy hand, our gentleman was absentmindedly mangling.

Strong breeze suddenly swayed the heavy brocade curtain that lovingly protected the furniture; for one fleeting moment, rays of sun gushed forth into the room causing momentary blindness that persisted for several seconds longer after the wind abated and darkness resumed. When the eyes regained their sight the room and its objects seemed darker and different; the palm-lined Brazilian coast was reduced to a menacing jagged silhouette; the loving birds, in turn, seemed pale and weak and their anemic song brought no joy or respite. Biedermeier realized he longed, for the first time, for the light drenched world he left behind.

Martin Guttman