

Press Release

MAX PEINTNER

Georg Kargl Fine Arts

Exhibition dates: September 16 – November 7, 2009

Caspar und ich, das sind viele

Trained architect Max Peintner (1937) became well known in the early 1970s with his sarcastic drawings critical of modern life. In their bitter acerbic wit, his visions of technology, ski lifts, or highways are still today considered icons of the Austrian environmentalist movement. In the mid-1970s, an eye illness drove the artist to engage with the process of vision itself. Peintner drew things that everyone is familiar with, but usually does not find worthy of mention, for example, afterimages that remain after we accidentally look into a bright light. "For him, drawn self-perception is an appropriate means of expression for representing the perceived environment as it emerges in our minds. His work is about trying to show analytically the feeling and sensations of the ego in the form of a depictive function of that ego" (Peter Weibel).

Max Peintner showed his first perception images in 1977 at Documenta 6, and represented Austria at the Venice Biennale in 1986. In 2000, Neue Galerie Graz dedicated a comprehensive retrospective to his work, and this was also the artist's last solo exhibition.

In eight years of untiring research, Peintner has explored the perspective, subjects, and fissures in the work of Caspar David Friedrich and created a presentation for the space of Georg Kargl Fine Arts that sketches the path taken by the artist from initial sketches to final drawings in oil stick. Peintner's interest in Friedrich developed from his experiments with perception.

"I noticed that the flicker in twilight reflects the gradation of neurons firing at the center of vision, and thus allow a concrete scaffolding to become visible which makes it possible to capture the space. In Friedrich's art, in a sense hidden by the use of air perspective, there is often such an inner structure of space, his geometry is sometimes reduced to mere horizon, the vanishing point, if there is one, is marked by fanned out sunbeams as if by an exclamation point."

According to the Tyrolean artist, landscapes are to be interpreted as dream-like visions and allow us to deduce something of the essence of the dreamer, and in these terms explains his fascination with one of the most important landscape painters of romanticism. Peintner takes on Friedrich's depictions of nature, often animated by a metaphysical transcendent character: he occupies himself intensely with their subject-matter and materiality, and in so doing provokes in his combination of various allusions to art history.

With a challenging “Porno is out, religion is in,” the artist refers to the religious components in Friedrich’s works, without sacrificing a subtle irony. According to Friedrich’s point of view, the experience of nature is a very personal mystical-religious event, for him faith is a steadfast, massive rock, the spiritual foundation of man. The beholder finds people in Friedrich’s images usually resting in themselves, impressed by the natural spectacle and dressed in formal clothing standing before a rock.

In Caspar David Friedrich, rear portraits are central, often of the artist himself. Since the 1980s, Max Peintner has repeatedly returned to the self-portrait as one of his key motifs, and always combines it with phenomena of perception and making perception visible. Max Peintner finds himself instrumentalizing the figure of this passive beholder for his own ends. The wanderer becomes a means for transporting his own experiences and naturally points to the destruction of nature and the environment by way of the consequences of technological progress such as aeroplanes and their condensation trails.

Peintner shows us the world dependent and centered around the beholder. He emphasizes that self-observation is only a reflection of beholding. In his absurd natural compositions with perceptive images, he demonstrates how we really see reality, that is, with the eye of a beholder that has subjective defects and is an internal observer of the world.

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