

**Encomium (opening 21.09, closing 19.10.2014) for the visiting artists Anke Eilergerhard and Detlef Waschkau at 'TEN – Ten years of art in the old pumping station'**

Dr Melanie Klier

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Dietmar Brixy, Mr Tammen, Anke Eilergerhard, and Detlef Waschkau:

I am delighted to be able to say a few words for today's anniversary exhibition. It is an honour to speak to a group of first-class curators, renowned artists, and such a sizeable art-going public about a kind of art that, as you will presently discover, draws from and transcends a vast array of themes – as in the 'Kitchenplastics' by Anke Eilergerhard – or art that creates new, imposing forms that lie somewhere between painting and sculpture through the use of paint, physical space, and motif, as in the wood reliefs of Detlef Waschkau. It is an absolute pleasure to be here today, and I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity.

The fact that we are now able to enjoy work by Brixy and two of his colleagues is due to the continued success of the collaboration between Dietmar Brixy and Berlin's prestigious Galerie Tammen & Partner. This collaboration is now in its third year – for this, too, we should give thanks!

In the course of a general description of their work in the exhibition 'TEN', the artists will themselves occasionally speak indirectly to what they find so fascinating about Dietmar Brixy's artwork. I would like to begin, however, with the words of Werner Tammen, Dietmar Brixy's Berlin gallerist. Brixy's work is particularly striking to Tammen because behind it there stands:

*an 'absolutely authentic artistic personality', who is 'perfectly mirrored here in the refuge of the pumping station: an auspicious way of life that manifests itself in an intense, honest painting practice carried out in an ideal edifice.'*

From this you can see for yourself, dear Dietmar, that your gallerist rightfully recognises you and your work as a 'Gesamtkunstwerk'. It is worth mentioning that in Werner Tammen, Dietmar Brixy has found a first-rate gallerist who represents artists not only in Berlin, but also at internationally renowned art fairs, from art KARLSRUHE to special appearances at Art Miami in the United States. Importantly, Tammen is also a figure who is truly able to recognise and appreciate the potential of this old property, the pumping station, and not regard it as competition. This is because Dietmar Brixy does not conceive of himself as a curator, but rather as someone who organises an exhibition of his own work every autumn for art lovers, and who uses his unique position to feature the work of his colleagues.

Heinrich Heine once said: 'The glory of the world is always equal to the glory of the spirit which regards it.' Taking this quote in its buoyant, optimistic, and life-affirming sense, I would like now to transition to Anke Eilergerhard's art and her words on Brixy's work.

Anke Eilergerhard was born in Wuppertal in 1963, and now lives and works in Berlin. She is without doubt one of the most exciting and important artists of her generation. Her fantastic, absurd silicone sculptures enjoy a reputation that is both international and unique. Whether it is due to her daring compositions, the textured embellishments of her surfaces, or the resounding clash of her colour choice, Eilergerhard's works are crowd-pleasers, on display in numerous museums, public and private collections, and at international art fairs. Here you will see what I mean...

What you see here today is a powerful, intensely colourful artistry bursting with opulence and baroque abundance. Anke Eilergerhard's 'Kitchenplastics' are brimming in their voluminous femininity and their delight in the sensuous handling of the material. In numerous – let's call them layers – the artist stacks 'silicone cream puffs' one atop the another in a pop-art fashion, letting the works multiply into groups of work such as the *WIRBELWINDE* or the curvaceous, appetising *ANNAS*. It is in this connection – in their fascinating combinations of layers and their powerful haptic quality – that one finds parallels to the dense, impasto images in Dietmar Brixy's group of works for 'Discover – Painting'. In conversation, Eilergerhard told me:

*At Art Miami, I found the tangible lavishness and baroque quality of his painting delicious. The way it drips, for example. The moods Brixy is able to convey in his painting, his full, deep use of colour. Bright, glaring colours – the kind that aren't normally permitted. That is where I find strong parallels to my work – he shows, as I do, just how lush life can be!*

If you take a moment to look up to the stage, you will see the pink, swirling sculpture *ROSEMARIE*. Set on a platform, *ROSEMARIE* is a rotating miracle of breasts built to reach the imposing height of two metres, and measuring 85 cm in diameter. It is a daring composition. Stacked in numerous, plate-like layers made of circular rows of 'cream puffs', the sculpture evokes a whirling femininity. The mid-section of the figure is accentuated by a ring composed of balls that appears almost oriental in nature. The head seems to arise from within a protruding hat-like shape made of dripping breasts.

Given its volume and weight, it is surprising how the work strikes a terpsichorean pose, maintaining its balance without tipping over. In short, it defies the force of gravity. Equally surprising is the fact that Anke Eilergerhard shapes her innumerable individual cream puffs by hand; they are formed so

perfectly that they might have been produced by machine. *ROSEMARIE* presents a wondrous balance, and thus, in the truest sense of the word, ‘stability’. It is a miracle of brightly coloured layers and haptic surfaces.

As noted, ladies and gentlemen, Anke Eilergerhard has constructed her work cycles *WIRBELWINDE* and *ANNAS* from silicone. The artist has chosen the material consciously; silicone is often used in cosmetic surgery to soften or repair blemishes in one’s appearance. It is a material therefore, that is perfectly suited to the artist not only in terms of its material characteristics. Her work literally ‘circles’ around the theme of beauty, and all of the phenomena linked to this fragile state – desire, love, luxury, excess, decadence, lust, intemperance, and deception.

The way in which Anke Eilergerhard’s titles provide her abstract works with a more definite form and semantic key is also fascinating. Later, for example, you will have a chance to see the fiery red tornado *Cristobal* in the living quarters of the pumping station. As Anke Eilergerhard explained, it has essentially ‘brought back the summer this year’. Or take the piece *Hermes* from *WIRBELHAND*, the deep sun-yellow messenger of the gods, exhibited on the patio such that, as the artist comments, he ‘seems to tilt and spin.’

Anke Eilergerhard’s feminine, ‘richly decorated exaggerations’, her *ANNAS*, similarly carry semantic meaning. It is no coincidence that the name of each piece – even the diminutive *ANNEGRETCHEN* and *ANTINA* – refers to the original name for femininity ‘Anna’ or ‘grace’. Two of these sumptuously decorated structures are on display in the living quarters, each with their own varying appearances and highly developed interior lives. They present objects caught in the middle of balancing acts, carefully stacked piles of exquisite tableware layered with and held in place by the artist’s signature cream puffs of silicone. It is this stacking, the embellishment and layering that seems to reproduce in an absurd manner the complex feminine morning rituals of making oneself presentable. In fact, one of the most striking aspects of these works is the palpable tension arising between the apparent precariousness of the sculpture and its counterbalance: the cups and saucers that seem to represent dangling earrings and other bodily adornments. The tableware structure is fantastic, a sort of feminine ‘Tower of Babel’, a ‘Cream-Cup Wonderland’ à la Alice, excuse me, *Anke Eilergerhard*.

The artist’s ever-changing menu of subtly disguised variations on this ‘cake art’ is on display in the kitchen, where you will find the sculpture *Himmel auf Erden*, an oversized, puff of whipped cream that makes a somewhat ironic appearance, as the material here represents sanitary ware.

Moving on to the six works on display above the sink, here you will see that the *KITCHENPLASTICS* – as Anke Eilergerhard titles all of her work – serve as ambassadors of pleasure. These works are more ambivalent and light-hearted, at least in their reception: Her *kitchenqueens international*, based on

cleaning bottles of all sorts, are encased in semi-transparent cream puffs. They are even filled with the kind of appetizing colours that make kitchen and cleaning work more marketable: e.g. apricot or apple-green.

‘A cake with cream is a piece of heaven on earth.’ Such has been the artist’s slogan since her first cake image, created in the mid-1980s. A piece of cherry cake from the Schwarzwald, rising up towards the heavens in numerous, rich layers, painted on floral fabric.

Let yourself be seduced by the work. But don’t touch please! You break it, you buy it!

Ladies and gentlemen, we come now to the art of Detlef Waschkau. His wood reliefs are on display just outside the old pumping station: On the patio as well as in the depths of this neo-Gothic industrial building, that is, in the exhibition room.

Before you take them in, however, you should know a few basic facts about the artist: Detlef Waschkau was born in 1961 in Hanover. He completed a course in design studies in 1992 with a focus on sculpture at the Aachen University of Applied Sciences. Directly thereafter there followed a course in visual art at the Berlin University of the Arts. In 1995 he received a scholarship from the Stiftung Kulturfond. He has been a member of the Deutscher Künstlerbund since 2011. His work with wood reliefs has taken him on numerous journeys through many continents, though he lives and works in Berlin. Detlef Waschkau is represented by highly reputed galleries in Germany, the Netherlands, and China.

Detlef Waschkau wishes you, dear Dietmar, the following:

*Dietmar should continue to follow his calling with dedication. I hope that he maintains the force and intensity so present in his work, and that he continues to develop in many other areas as well!*

There are three particular items of note: First of all, it is a distinct pleasure that we are able to see part of the work *Evolution*, on display in the pumping station especially for this celebratory exhibition. Only a part of it is on show because the entire work is a 13 x 3 metre wood relief installation completed in the spring of 2014 at the Berlin Sculpture Workshop. It was presented exclusively at this year's art KARLSRUHE, then had its Berlin premiere at Galerie Tammen & Partner. To give you a sense of the overall piece, this part is now on display exclusively at the pumping station. The focus on people, the city, and architecture are commonly found in Detlef Waschkau's work, which is sculptural in the most literal sense of the term. He is a world traveller. He visited Japan for the first time in 2002, and later in 2011/12 travelled to Beijing and Nanjing in China. He has also taken trips to large cities. Today we see street scenes from Amsterdam, as well as Detlef Waschkau's chosen home, Berlin. Finally – as is quite evident – there are also scenes from Mannheim.

The second special feature includes two works that take into their purview the water tower (which aside from the baroque castle is the most important landmark in Mannheim). Not purely by coincidence, August of this year marked the 125th anniversary of the water tower. And now on to the third special feature: On the outer wall of the patio, you will find a portrait, *Dietmar Brixly and David Richardson*. This is a commissioned work, and, should you have the desire, you too can have a portrait painted of yourself. Ask the pumping station team for further information.

But now to the art itself: Speaking about Detlef Waschkau's wood reliefs, Ralf Burmeister has concluded:

*He can paint with a chisel and carve with a brush: Detlef Waschkau has granted relief carving, which since antiquity has been an art form that existed between sculpture and painting, a contemporary visual language. Working with laminated poplar, Waschkau creates works that embody definite contradictions: The angularity of the chiselled wood stands in contrast to the panel's delicate coloration. The spontaneity of the applied colour gradient takes place within the precisely planned structure of the image. Compact surfaces are interrupted by a fluid style of illustration. Finally, a specific, figurative theme arises from the abstraction of individually composed, collage-like sections of the image.*

There is no better description of Waschkau's reliefs, but it is worth unravelling these dense statements and plunging directly into the work itself. Waschkau's visual objects occupy a middle ground between

painting and sculpture. Three important factors take equal footing here: Colour, space, and theme. One must imagine Detlef Waschkau's work as a sculptor begins with colour. This is sprayed and poured onto laminated poplar in expressive gestures, freely and without any preconceived theme, until it penetrates the wood. He then shapes and arranges these spontaneous gestures by superimposing a grid onto the working surface. On this grid structure, Waschkau then sketches out the pictorial motif. His images derive from photographs – impressions – of large cities. For the artist it is precisely the 'unimportant', everyday content of life that is worthy of representation, and that provides the aesthetic content that is eventually 'drawn out from the wood'. Beginning with the chisel, he carves out layer after layer (sometimes more, sometimes less), then covers the unprimed wood with paint, then elaborates the sketch with a chisel, modulates the sketch layer by layer with a new grid, carves into it again, leaves it to rest, covered with paint.

What truly interests Detlef Waschkau are moments that are often overlooked: an interesting posture, for example, as in *Stehenden and Amsterdam Frau* (on the patio), or a moment capturing the kinetic interactions among people in the urban environment, e.g. his depictions of Istanbul in *Evolution* (in the display room). In these scenes, his figures often remain anonymous, appearing faceless or wearing masks. He finds a compelling aesthetic beauty in urban construction sites or traffic stops, as in *Straussberger Platz* or *Blau Berlin*, with its meandering pattern of above-ground water pipes.

Throughout all of this, it is fascinating how Waschkau's 'painted sculpture' succeeds in maintaining an admirable tension between his sketch-like, serene use of colour and his sculptural plasticity. In short, he straddles the line between representational and abstract art, between tranquillity and expressive power.

Our gaze passes through layer after layer of overlapping themes in which space seems to disintegrate into sensitively adjusted surfaces while still maintaining its integrity. In this connection, Dr Peter Funken has spoken of 'compositional tension and balanced proportionality', and 'dematerialisation and concretisation'.

Pablo Picasso once said: 'Art is the best way to understand the culture of the world.'

With this in mind, I hope you enjoy the process of 'discovering' the works, which despite their variety all hold one essential quality in common: They are celebratory, they take joy in their diverse approaches to their materials, combining multiple layers or levels, and most importantly in opening completely new horizons for us, the viewers. Thank you for your time.

Dr. Melanie Klier