

Von gegenüber/From Straight Across

Thoughts on Recent Works by Henrik Urs Müller

It must have been in winter; one of his works, *Chandelier with Tulips*, from the 2019-series with a dark, rhythmically arranged, two-storied facade consisting of light windows, showed a long-necked amaryllis in a brightly lighted window. Only its shape pointed to the flower. Each of the other windows harboured a different solitary plant or flower in a vase, all decorously positioned in the centre with semi-transparent curtains in the background – a view/picture meanwhile hardly to be encountered at Schröderstraße in Berlin's centre.

The all-dominating chandelier in this 'panel series' with upside-down bottles arranged on a suspended Duchamp-like bottle drying rack relates to an apartment with a view on a facade on the opposite side of the road. It is the artist's apartment located opposite of Semjon Contemporary. The picture describes a situation that is long gone now. The curtains and solitary plants have disappeared and with them their owners and inhabitants of the building. The house was modernized in 2019 and has completely changed its outer appearance – not necessarily to its advantage. Müller's work also illustrates and documents the changes currently taking place all over Berlin, as gentrification is almost completed in this district. However, the series also tells the artist's personal story in the context of Schröderstraße/Berlin.

As my artistic assistant, Henrik U. Müller has supported me and my publicly accessible *gesamtkunstwerk KioskShop berlin (KSb)* for eleven years from 2000 to 2011. His current apartment is a result of this cooperation, as we were informed long in advance by the previous tenant that this apartment would soon become available.

The unconventional technique of his panel work, which the artist has developed since his late 2000ies when creating another large work, is a result of a personal handicap. The mobility of his right hand is restricted, which means that he cannot handle large formats alone. However, a virtue was made of necessity, and the artist even developed his own imagery through assembling small elements to a cohesive whole, expressed in his panel (or more precisely: platelet) work, which is composed of single beech platelets serving either as carriers for diverse materials and layers or are visually merged through the artist's conscious use of transparent spots which visually let the wood 'breathe' for us.

Photography has formed the basis of all his creation in the last two decades, which is evident in the chandelier pictures. Added to this is the use of leaf gold (composite)

that, combined with lacquered colour fields, forms a complex picture playing with back- and foregrounds, once golden, replacing shape, once serving as background in order to let the golden chandelier shine. (With changing incidence of light the golden ground may appear bright as light or deep red.)

Over the years Henrik U. Müller has created a multi-faceted oeuvre, excerpts of which are shown in the current exhibition presenting the broad variety of his work but also highlighting contentual interrelations. The motif of the plant, mostly blossoms of geranium and cherry or tulip flowers, is central to his work and appears already very early. Through his occupation with the historical Amber Room of St. Petersburg (preserved only on photographs, and meanwhile reconstructed as a walk-in-room) for his expansive installation *Amber Room/Bernsteinzimmer* the artist has discovered the plant as motif in 2012. The amber marquetry emphasizes and strengthens the Baroque appearance— like in an all-over painting – enlivened by a flowing arabesque ornament, sensitively balanced and interwoven, and integrated into the overall structure of rhythmically arranged wall sections.

Increasingly, over the past few years Müller has distanced himself from the genre of photograph, so far primarily realized in his works on paper. His photographs display the collage principle of layering and can equally be understood as formal studies, each of which is also an autonomous work of art. Already in the series *Foliage/Blattwerk* (begun in 2018) photographic details are negated and completely replaced by monochrome shapes, either executed in gold or lacquer paint. And thus we get a hunch of what the motif could be, which is, however, no longer relevant. It comes to light that composition is perceived as interplay of form and colour. Experimental photography becomes painting!
Henrik Urs Müller has conquered a new technique and will surely keep expanding both in parallel.

He had only just begun to work on his new series *Crooked/Bent with X/Verkrümmt mit X*, when Corona virus started to spread – still in search for concrete shapes to come into being. Reduced to interlocked rectangular planes and a black cluster of bent lines, his works are almost detached from their photographic model: pure composition. Their interaction with works from the foliage series, as a result of the alternating hanging scheme in the exhibition space (Garten-Salon), provides insight into this shift of paradigm.

And here the circle closes with respect to the chandelier pictures on the opposing wall, which are very personal in nature: only recently Henry U. Müller could return to his studio that he shares with Ute Essig, whose works are also displayed in this

exhibition. As the 'artist with the three hearts' (for 21 years now, the artist has been carrier of a heart implant; prior to that he had been connected to an artificial heart with fortunately only limited portability for one year) he had to hide in the isolation of his apartment. As a former physician he knows about his own risks and his apartment has become his special place of retreat.

His view on the facade opposite his house, on his gallery, has been more present than ever. As I had also locked myself in my gallery, our daily balcony talks and early morning walks have had a beneficial effect on both of us.

The fact that the chandelier pictures, already realized in 2019, have been recharged through the Corona crisis may be conceived as a special twist of fate – *From Straight Across!*

Semjon H. N. Semjon
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Please see also other publications on the work of Henrik U. Müller that have appeared in the course of our cooperation.