

Henrik Urs Müller

Vita et Vanitas – The Lightness of Creation and Decay

March 2nd – April 14th, 2018

There had already been many indications; at the latest since Henrik Urs Müller's last solo-exhibition in 2016 the course has been set for the lightness of a subject already well-known in art history with a sense of meaningful profoundness attached to it: the subject of creation and decay, of life and (approaching) death, of *vita et vanitas*.

For his series *Bernsteinzimmer* from 2012 the artist had sought inspiration in his own, very personal way, following the historical model of the overall work of art. With the aid of traditional black-and-white photographs of a presumably destroyed *gesamtkunstwerk* it was revived as a chimera in the form of transformed, discreetly pearlescent wallpaper covering the gallery walls. Some details of the overflowing abundance of the amber-inlaid subject of the picture the artist has highlighted with the help of a self-developed technique of photograph transfer onto transparent adhesive foil, combined and reassembled with gold leaf and varnishes, breathing new, golden and airy life into them. He has exchanged some floral elements and supplemented them through photographic inlays, which suddenly break open the ornamental interlace relief of the (historical) Amber Room giving way to an unprecedented spatial depth. The assemblage of the picture from almost square single birch plates animates the image through irregular joints and a differently strong tilting of the many image tiles.

The amber-project experience, and the technique of dissecting and recombining blossom photographs (here magnolia) and using them as working material, the artist has continuously developed further over the years.

The floral and blossom motifs have become autonomous and self-sufficient, independent of the historical-cultural context of the Amber Room.

The long standing studio community he shares with the porcelain, ceramic and knitting-artist Ute Essig (also participant in the SC program) has inspired Henrik Urs Müller to create further new series. One of these series, the 'Ute vases' (started in 2016 and still in progress), makes use of the capricious shapes of porcelain vessels made by his colleague, which show letterings with political messages and pictograms, and makes them the basis of his floral still lifes. Only the basic shapes of the vases, mostly overlaid with an ornament, can still be recognized, and form the basis for a spreading bunch of tulips, which already show traces of decay and are obviously withered. This sense of impermanence is even intensified through serial repetition of individual petals (dissected in photoshop and realigned), at first glance appearing blurred, almost like in a motion picture, indicating a movement of the flower, and thus celebrating the process of withering as visual experience.

His present series *Vita et Vanitas*, created in this still young year, appears hopeful, light and vibrant, which corresponds well with the beginning of the year and the longing for springtime.

Here also tulips are twisted like snakes, spreading in beautiful moves into the room, while other pictures concentrate rather on individual flowers, exposing the beauty of the individual blossoms.

Through the combination with the bright, ivory-shimmering visual space and sparing use of leaf gold, mostly on the flower stems, a joyous affirmation of life is expressed, and beauty itself is celebrated. Only later (and in combination with the title) we become aware of the *vanitas*-implications involved. Here, life appears friendly and becomes pleasure.

Henrik Urs Müller's new works appear light and elegant and you cannot get enough of these shapes and colours, the interplay of individual tulips, which becomes a dialogue between space and object.

Semjon H. N. Semjon
February 2018