

Dangerous Liaisons

by Christine Lemke-Matwey

An easy chair, touching and sorry and awful. Sunflowers on a background the color of blue ink; the fabric is coarse, and the border fabric around the legs makes sluggish waves. Philipp Fürhofer explains that he was looking for this armchair for a long time, for exactly this armchair, till one day he found it on eBay and bought it at auction. For 37€. Normally people are happy finally to be rid of junk like this, and the seller in Bayreuth surely was. Fürhofer has now made it float in a plexiglass vitrine, the heirloom as showpiece, slightly askew, as though it had limped its whole life, one of the shoulders half ripped off and ripped open, its innards mellowly gushing out, wood shavings, horsehair, foam, whatever. On four sides of the vitrine itself Fürhofer has painted an Alpine idyll: luscious meadows, stalwart forests, here and there the odd hay barn. Not naïve, no, everything but, threatening, proliferating, lambent, a landscape of the sort one sees before the inner eye, the fear-eye, traumatic yet authentic, almost psychedelic, with colors that have a density and physicality of their own and really bring out, indeed seem to give birth to, the living room cheer that has become the armchair. Or to devour it, depending on one's perspective.

Nature as illusion and space for longing?

Our last salvation and conceived and staged and in use as such, and a person beholding an Alpine idyll, a solitary forest, a glacial passage, sounds of the sea, a field full of flowers will erupt into highly calculated delight, as though all this existed without his doing, his eyes, his gaze, and existed solely for his encouragement and comfort?

Painting, Fürhofer says, is immensely important. It is the tie that binds: everything still so heterogeneous, all centrifugal forces, everything collapsing and collapsed. It is painting, with its artisanal aspects, virtuosity and craftsmanship, that first legitimates his artistic work. Painting in acrylics and oils, on foil, monitors, glass, plexiglass and other substrata that may be astonished to find themselves painted on, and sometimes on canvas as well. Painting along a variety of collages, montages and objects, above these and beyond, through these and beyond. Painting for the shop window and the opera stage. In his youth, Philipp Fürhofer often tromped through nature with his easel. This was smirked at as anachronistic, or suspected of being half in imitation of the New Leipzig School. Today his works are called *Down There in the Valley*, *Clearing*, *Melting*, *Tornado* — and *Artistic Existence*: three paint tubes pouring out from above into a largeformat acrylic glass box stuffed full of newsprint and other papers. Here again, painting causes something that otherwise could be provided at best by aleatorics or the

reflected glory of Pop Art and Combine Painting: the illusion of a physicality. Furies, powerful traces of life. A scrambling and scurrying, a wheezing, thrashing and rustling on the surface and beneath it. Something that causes shivers precisely because it remains an impenetrable construct, yet seduces us to see, to infiltrate.

It would be an easy thing for Fürhofer to unmask his variety of readymades and to tear apart the sentimental petty-bourgeois dreams, as dreamt by vacuum cleaners, installation conduits and colored pencils, on the pillory of an aesthetic nine times cool: See this, have a look, this is how it is under civilized roofs and in civilized heads! Forget, all of you, every catastrophe of the twenty-first century, every biblical flood in Pakistan and purgatorial fire in Russian, every tsunami and tornado, every uprooted rain forest and befouled sea deep, and every one of the 33 Chilean miners 700 meters beneath the surface of the Earth — in this country the champion is (in the case of the armchair) comfort and/or (in the case of the paint tubes) the selfsufficiency of every last endeavor in art. This is not to say that *Greetings from Bayreuth* (the postcard-ready title of the upholstered furniture installation) knows and says nothing about all this. It says this too, not this alone, not ideologically, but specifically and humorously.

Fürhofer is neither cynic, moralist, nor do-gooder, and is certainly not what he is out of an urge to riot or negate. His works are far too intensively linked to their material for this. They are also far too romantic in their mode of composition — by drawing out into the interior, into the innermost; by asserting chaos without mourning the loss of paradise; and by using painting to connect all these things to one another. The mountain dramas together with the deep-sea jellyfish whose light generation Fürhofer explores, the melting processes with the burning processes, the visible with the invisible, abused nature with music, opera, the first gaze with the eleventh.

Dangerous liaisons. MISSING LINKS.

Thus the consistent way out of twodimensionality into three-dimensionality, thus Fürhofer's breaking out from canvas into the light box, thus the use of one-way mirror foil, tricking the viewer in the literal and doubled sense of that German idiom for a trick, of "leading someone behind the light."

Fürhofer nonetheless remains the sovereign. If he turns on a given light source (like a screen onto which X-ray images are stretched), he threatens to lose himself in the depths and shoals, in the bowels of the work of art, in the jam-packed, piled-up, compliantly deposited on one another, in the hopeless diagno-

sis. If he turns off the light source, his gaze runs aground:
on the closedness of the surface, on the artist's own reflection.
As though the observer caught himself observing, as though
he became aware that it is up to him, if not to save this sorry
overabundant world, then at least to take precise notice.

Christine Lemke-Matwey is an editor at the Berlin newspaper
»*Tagesspiegel*«, radio author, and writes
regularly for the newspaper »*Zeit*«.

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