

press release

MICHAEL KREBBER

20 September – 14 October 2001

private view: 6 - 8 pm Saturday 15 September 2001

Michael Krebber is also presenting a collection of work *Shordt Ridte in a fasdt maschine, examples of the art collection of Des Esseintes* that will be showing at The Top Room, 16th September – 14th October

Maureen Paley Interim Art is pleased to present the gallery's first solo exhibition by Michael Krebber.

If you were to describe Michael Krebber's artwork in one adjective, then restrained would probably be the appropriate term. There is something essentially recessive about the works of this 46 year old Cologne painter, who has been operating with tentative gestures and abruptly terminating brush strokes for years.

In the retrospective show of his work co-organised by the Kunstverein Braunschweig and the Städtische Galerie Wolfsburg, Krebber however exhibits another side to himself. Taken on its own, the presentation of his artworks has a direct and vigorous effect, causing a peculiar relation with the Krebberesque 'quarrelling' brush strokes. This principle of moving in opposite directions at once is pursued on different levels. Krebber belongs to the kind of artist who, in case of doubt, would actually rather prefer not to do a certain thing. Nevertheless, Krebber's work has never been about a denial of the art world.

Rather, he has cultivated an attitude of a kind of scrupulousness, aimed less against the necessity for exhibitions, galleries, and art markets, than against blind art production. Particularly in the Eighties, his sharp, often inexorable judgements concerning art earned him wide respect from fellow artists such as Martin Kippenberger or Albert Oehlen. But it was the unyielding character of his own small body of work that surely prevented him from also becoming acknowledged institutionally. Furthermore, Krebber is an example of an 'artists artist', one who is particularly appreciated by other artists. The rest of the world usually takes a little longer to approach art that was never about mediation from the beginning. It is actually quite hard to find the right words for these initially forbidding paintings. The painter's self-consciousness is transferred to the viewer.

Michael Krebber has never been a painter who paints exclusively; his background is that of a conceptual artist. In the late Eighties, he said good-bye to the then widespread idea that the artist had to present products. His now legendary exhibition at the Isabella Kacprzak Gallery (1989) consisted of an empty showcase and some photographs of a fictitious exhibition. Seen in retrospect, the conceptual phase that was launched thereby can also be regarded as a continuation of an extremely sceptical painterly attitude. After all, Krebber, in his time as a student of Markus Luepertz and later as assistant to Georg Baselitz, had already gained the reputation of being less a young Painter Prince than a notorious picture annihilator. Krebber makes available all manner of material with which to illustrate his own stuckness - from the over-paintings through which countless previously erased layers shimmer, to the constantly re-positioned, wafer-thin brush strokes that break up so prematurely.

Information provided by a missing letter

This openly displayed stagnation has nothing to do with the topos of failure that is once more in favour - a lofty failure, popularly referred to when accounting for artists like Jonathan Meese. Flirting with your own failure has by now become a drained convention. Krebber on the other hand puts forward the view that working with painting also means being thrown back to the same point over and over again. In a psychological study contained in the catalogue, the English artist Merlin Carpenter correctly points out that Krebber can in this way leave behind him the principle of development. Krebber's achievement lies in the fact that he acts out the pressure generated by his model precedents - often also by means of disputes with other artists.

Sometimes the bold strokes of a Polke are appropriated, and then sometimes the flourish of a Picabian linework. Baselitz's influence is clearly inscribed in a painting from 1979 - a thickly and brusquely painted smoking figure, depicted upside down. Only of what nature exactly is the relationship to these others? When the paralysing effect of setting your standards this high is so well recognised?

The title of the exhibition *Apothekerman*, with its missing last letter, provides some information in this regard. It stands for what I would call Krebber's preference for subtractions: there is always something being subtracted from the underlying models. This process of 'emptying appropriation' can be demonstrated particularly well with the help of one of his new paintings - a smeared, brown-yellow monochrome colourfield, with its torn canvas demonstratively referring to Lucio Fontana. On the one hand, the amazingly assertive application of paint speaks for the fact that Fontana's model of the slit canvas was extremely inspiring for Krebber. On the other, in Krebber's hands, Fontana's lofty gesture of slitting is turned into a laconic statement of fact. For behind the torn-out shreds of canvas, a profane wooden frame shows through, like a wretched bone depriving the painting of its emotion or pathos.

When Krebber deep-freezes the gestures of those he quotes, he is clearly also treating them violently. This fits with the firm decisiveness behind both his presentation and his hanging. Sometimes Krebber shoves a board between wall and painting. In Wolfsburg, a number of paintings from the last ten years are spread out over a surface made up out of wallpaper pasting tables. They lie there as they would hang on a wall - sometimes gaps are left between them, sometimes they form a continuum. Brought into the horizontal, they seem to recognise their status as commodities and to present themselves as articles of consumption. You bend over to inspect them like you would the goods in a bargain counter display.

This, too, is part of the way in which the painter is expressing an awkwardness towards his own work whilst at the same time, the viewer is enjoined to treat the paintings with an even greater scrupulousness and sovereignty.

The Doubts of the Painter (Die Zweifel des Malers) Isabelle Graw
First published: DIE ZEIT February 2001

Gallery opening hours: Thursday to Sunday 11.00 - 6.00 and by appointment

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