

Press release

Žiga Kariž | Freud, Marx and Me

30 April – 11. June, 2016

Opening: Friday, 29. April, 2016, 7 pm

cubus-m | Pohlstraße 75 | 10785 Berlin

cubus-m is delighted to present the gallery's first solo exhibition by the Slovenian artist Žiga Kariž (*1973), *Freud, Marx and Me*.

Kariž's complex *gesamtwerk* develops partly out of the artist's thorough examination of the modernist tradition's strategies of image and process. From this starting point the artist formulates his own artistic position in which his own memories (the crucial 'Me') are brought into relationship with influences from visual media, pop culture and sociopolitical discourse on all levels.

In this exhibition the artist presents a new series of works on canvas as well as sculptural objects. The paintings hanging in the front room can be divided into two large bodies of work: a series of nudes from 2015 and a more recent series newly interpreting unused sketches from an earlier series from 2009. The works from both series range in scale from small to monumental, hung tightly together without hierarchy or thematic structure, occupying all wall space like a 19th century salon. Borrowing the method of Martin Kippenberger's *Peter. The Russian Position* and in similar Hermitage arrangement to the front room, Kariž occupies the back space with objects which also refer to earlier sculptural pieces by the artist. The selection of work and way of presenting is a knowing expression of Kariž's artistic strategy in which he connects and mixes together the immense realm of images from the information age and the self reflexive observation of one's own visual world (for Kariž, looking back at his own work).

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Kariž's series of nudes unashamedly refers to Matisse's Nu Bleu I - IV from 1952 but uses pornographic material from the Internet for his cut-outs, assembling the female body on a green-yellow acrylic paint background. As with all his works on canvas, the images that comprise the motifs are first worked on at the computer before being printed on standard photographic 10 x 15 cm sized paper which is then mounted onto the painted canvas, imparting, in the case of the nudes, an almost haptic quality to the skin. Alongside the sexually explicit imagery, the reduction of colour in the canvases is remarkable and may recall green screen technology in which the chosen image can be placed on an arbitrary background. The artist thereby creates the greatest possible neutrality and leaves it to the observer to choose the setting. In this way, Kariž's nudes are a reflection of the (male) gaze on the female body and the tradition of the nude (including porn) but despite this we are not left at this most obvious point of his art, the clash between high and trivial culture with which the artist fundamentally plays. The memory of 70s pop culture, which the nudes hint at and to which Kariž seems loyal, is greatly exaggerated in the second series of paintings. In these works the artist explicitly refers to the era of his 1970s childhood which he spreads before us without fear of kitschy nostalgia. On orange-green and in the brown tones of bare canvas, motifs from advertisements of the time (like LEGO), are combined with pictures of mushrooms, trains, dreaming nudes in landscapes, a clichéd visual metaphorical vocabulary of a child's awakening sexuality. It may be the attempt to restore the childlike innocence, the untainted gaze, but the doubts about the success of this plan are already present. At first the works seem to offer a counterpoint to the crass clarity of the nudes but they are to be understood much more as their compliment. Kariž only deals with sex superficially, as a sticker that lacks any intimacy or real sensuality; the artist uses sex much more as a projection screen on which to reflect the power of the mediated image and its influence on our perception, view of the world, reception and ultimately on the creation of art. The image world of the media and its topoi are deeply rooted in us all and in this information age, equally common to all of us, it dictates our memories and our desires and is the universal leveller between the noblest and most trivial. The 'innocent gaze' seems just as impossible as creating something totally new. One of Kariž's greatest strengths is this application of the spectator and himself as an artist to these conditions in each new work.

With the objects in the back room of the gallery, the artist also introduces diverse references to art history. The objects comprise in the main of Heineken bottles and their packaging materials and sometimes Nutella jars which are assembled into constructions reminiscent of modernist sculpture - the flirtation with Duchamp is obvious and one may also think of Warhol's Brillo Boxes. The bottles and boxes are partly painted so that in some places, only the red Heineken star can be seen. Of course he knows the power of logos and knows even more about their interchangeability, in the end a red star sells everything – be it beer or world view. Kariž also plays here with the sexual connotations that beer bottles can awaken, making possibly the most vulgar and simultaneously beautiful gestures in the exhibition: two of them plunged into a Nutella glass. The red star of the Heineken logo, the possibilities of psychoanalytical meaning of bottles plunged into glasses... at last one seems to be able to understand the exhibition title, Freud, Marx and Me.

Of course Freud and Marx, just like Matisse and Duchamp, porn and beer, have everything and nothing to do with this exhibition. The artist also uses the holy pillars of modernist theory only as stickers and images, playing here also with the actual inconsistency of this conjunction. This conjunction of course has a long tradition of misinterpretation and reinterpretation of even these serious philosophical positions and academic theories so that in the collective reception they remain as little more than cliches, almost as arbitrarily replaceable as images in a green screen. The observer is free to choose their own background - nothing is really wrong but nothing is really right either. Kariž, purposely positioning himself next to 'giants', poses and hints that the exhibition could reveal something about him as a person but in this agile twist, he removes himself from the affair with a wink. He too can only be grasped as cliché.

Žiga Kariž uses and also serves images. The categories, formulas and traditions his images originate from interest him less than the contexts in which he can transform them. The ambiguity that defines his work is not indifference or a retreat to the safe haven of irony but rather arises from the equitable treatment of his visual material and its sources. Just as in his wider artistic practice, this strategy is his answer to the question that the medium of painting can still afford itself in contemporary art, where neither the artists' gaze nor the spectator's are free (from the traditions of art history, the misunderstandings

of history and humanities in the West, the ubiquity of media, the surfaces of pop culture and all the limitations and inevitability that go along with them). His works do not subordinate the mediated image and he is too smart to offer his work to some political or theoretical 'ism'. Kariž reflects our visual world, the mediated image and media theory canon and releases his work in this role as observer from a mass culture that is accelerating more and more and shows us one thing above all: the possibility of one's own standpoint.

Text: Sebastian Schemann

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