

Capitain Petzel

UWE HENNEKEN

Rotation und Abrieb

Capitain Petzel, Berlin 11 September - 20 October, 2012

Opening: Friday, 14 September, 6 - 8.30 pm

Through the sieve of cultural anthropology, Christianity, mythology, primitivism, and art history, the Berlin based artist Uwe Henneken has from the outset of his career exploited contradictions to generate new truths in painting. An initiate of arcane esoteric knowledge, for the exhibition *Rotation und Abrieb*, Henneken takes his cue from Sir James George Frazer's, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*.

The 19th century classic is a comparative study on myth, religion, superstition, and ritual sacrifice from the primitives to Christian theology. Amidst its many fables and lore both high and low cultures shared a dependency on the cycle of seasons and corn was the main sustenance for life. Corn was deemed to have a spirit represented in the last sheaf that was distinguished as the "Corn King" or "Corn Mother"; it's cutting was done through ritual sacrifice. The whole ceremony concludes with this specially selected "old" seed mixed into the new grains in order to enable the next crop to grow and thrive.

In this Henneken sees a parallel to contemporary painting, where sampling and image recycling are contextually de rigueur. In his studio practice canonized (or less so) referenced images are ritualistically sacrificed then cannibalized; in the resultant paintings their constituent parts are made whole again resurrected as Henneken's. The ancient rite of painting, like the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth lays claim to art historical continuity thus pushing it forward into the present.

For this 2012 series the artist appropriates key elements from symbolism as reproduced in various media formats. He extracts the allegories of individualists such as Odilon Redon, Maurice Denis, Paul Sérusier, and Puvis de Chavannes; artists who in their day were iconoclasts difficult to categorize. Thematically modified and reworked with fauvist color schemes they are distinctive in their synthesis of subject matter and style. Leaving gaps of white space in the structure of the paintings shatters the perceptual illusionism found in the original sources. The hubris of media images that are reproduced ad infinitum in the culture at-large takes a backseat to a higher calling; the artist concisely constructs an alter-reality by filtering pictorial anomalies found in the reproduction "flaws" (faded colors, scratches, et al.) into unapologetically symbolist contemporary paintings.

In his identity as a conceptual painter with a Romantic's antipathy to classicism Uwe Henneken bends different genres at the sacrificial altar of today's archival picture databank. Metaphorically speaking it's the painter's equivalent of image sacrifice in order to separate the "wheat from the chaff". In contrast to common painterly practices, studies tend to be more precise while the finished paintings tend to be studies and are created simultaneously or even after the seemingly sketchy primary paintings. These precise studies underline their dissolving and vanishing.

The series *Abschied von Nemi* consisting of two large-scale triptychs, alongside some smaller paintings in the main gallery space, highlights Henneken's concept of *Rotation und Abrieb*. All are repetitions and alterations; each recycled version depicts the prequel to the corn king fable: a nude standing figure handling a double scythe in front of a person laying on the ground. They symbolize the rite of the new king killing the old in order to let his soul survive as it moves and reincarnates into the new youthful body. The cycle then comes full circle. In prescribing his own cyclic way of thinking the artist clearly distances himself from Frazer's radical enlightenment period conclusion that there exists a final evolutionary development from magic, to religion, to science.

Text: Max Henry

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Opening hours: Tuesday - Saturday 11 am to 6 pm