

The Aliens' Keepers

A Conversation with Collector Jochen Kienzle at the Freundschaftsinsel Exhibition Pavilion

Gerold Paul

What counts is the image. Collector Jochen Kienzle. Photo: Kitty Kleist-Heinrich

The art collector is much like an alien who moves between at least two worlds. Although he does not make the art himself, the collector appears to love it just as much as the painter loves his picture. Thus it was only logical for the Brandenburgischer Kunstverein Potsdam (BKV) to organize an insightful conversation about collecting on the Freundschaftsinsel, where a number of Classical Modern "Aliens" are presently gathered in a must-see show of the same name. On Sunday evening, art historian, gallerist, and collector Jochen Kienzle answered questions posed by Gerrit Gohlke, the BKV's business manager, artistic director, and this exhibition's curator.

Almost thirty mostly suave visitors attended this opening event entitled "Modern Art and its Person." First came a guided tour of the not-so-well-known giants of modernity including artists like Berthold Matthes, Gary Stephan, and Jack Whitten, whose works Gohlke explained by applying all interpretive subtleties. The exhibits either belong to Jochen Kienzle's private collection or to the Kienzle Art Foundation, founded a year ago and located in Berlin-Charlottenburg. According to the enthusiastic collector, many artists await their discovery – or rediscovery. Jochen Kienzle comes from Swabia where his parents pursued a similar pastime. Apparently, they left their treasures hanging in the same place for too long. Born in 1957 and calling Berlin his home, it is hence logical for Kienzle to keep rearranging all his new acquisitions – whether purchased, traded, or procured directly from the artist – until everything falls into place.

This brings us to the center of the matter: Apprenticed as a carpenter who later became an art historian, collecting is not just a romantic passion for the joys of ownership for Kienzle. After successfully chasing down objects domestically and abroad, the will for order is part of the game. True collectors call this process "to play." Art as toy? Fine. At the same time, all must be art historically sound since even a collector depends on the recognition of friend and foe. Founded in 1997, the Galerie Kienzle & Gmeiner's program attempted somewhat to avoid the latest tendencies that the art world and other galleries advocated by selecting potent works whose value was not based on their possible surplus. Instead, their personal position was explained to the establishment, as exemplified just now by "Aliens" on the Freundschaftsinsel: "What counts is the image," says Kienzle. Also at home, because to be sitting on the sofa in such well-ordered company and to be happy is, according to Kienzle, the only thing that counts.

Amidst the works in this alien show talk revolved around the collector's personal logic, addressing issues like how to find or how to collect, and even the wicked phrase "studio stock" came up. Other subjects broached included vanities, favorite pictures, and the exchange with equals. When the audience wanted to know how you identify good art, Kienzle – according to the Internet he is constantly invited to such collectors-talks – replied "Look, look, look, and keep comparing!" It remains doubtful whether this will help a novice. Although this exhibition exudes a frigid notion, at least someone inquired about a collector's heart. Extending all the way to the audience, the language of the first exchanges also remained frigid, adhering to art academy terminology and censuring the increasingly worsening German art criticism. The tongue became twisted when it came to describing a painting like "Grundierung 1" by Franz Erhard Walther – and, do take a note of this, it was made unmistakably clear who the guardians and the keepers of the paintings are: those who are trained and sophisticated, the insiders – the aliens' keepers.

*The exhibition „Alien – das unheimliche Wesen aus einer fremden Welt“
"Alien, the eerie creature from an alien world" will be extended until July
31, Tuesday to Sunday Noon to 6PM in the Freundschaftsinsel's exhibition
pavilion.*

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