

KUNST Magazin Conversation with Collector Jochen Kienzle

The Zoo must watch out to make sure it does not lose its visitors to the museum.

After his carpentry apprenticeship Jochen Kienzle studied art history in Munich. Thanks to his parent's collection, he encountered Classical Modern Art. In 1997 he met Annette Gmeiner and together they opened the gallery "Kienzle & Gmeiner" in Berlin. Today, he is the president of the Kienzle Art Foundation in Berlin-Charlottenburg.

How old were you when you began to collect art?

I even "collected" when I was at high school. The very first piece I purchased was a HAP Grieshaber, which I got at an art fair. But it was not until the 1980s, as a student, that I began to collect more strategically.

Initially you had a soft spot for informal painting.

Emil Schumacher was in the neighborhood. That was of course a wonderful start. I purchased the first pictures from his wife and then tried to figure out what else would go with it. I purchased my first Jonathan Lasker painting before they began to talk about him at the university. I suddenly realized that for both artists the paint is also the material. This fascinated me and I contacted the gallerist Annette Gmeiner in Stuttgart. At the time, she was my door opener. It was the first time that I had the opportunity to meet various artists in person, and dealt with them concerning content. There was a group of artists in Stuttgart who were constantly forced to defend themselves because their works were unwieldy. However, I saw a lot of substance in their experimental pieces.

You then went to Berlin with Annette Gmeiner in 1996 to open a gallery.

In the fall we saw a Klaus Merkel show in Leipzig together and wanted to go to Berlin on a little detour. Annette Gmeiner had seen a space on Zimmerstraße that had been empty since the summer. That was the birth of the gallery "Kienzle & Gmeiner." We opened with an Emilio Prini exhibition.

You are presently also showing Emilio Prini at your Berlin headquarters on Bleibtreustraße.

I have always continued to follow him because I consider him one of the truly important artists. He is a very difficult and radical person. His works deal with contrast. He is the only Arte Povera artist who takes space into consideration by virtue of reapplying his works. Time and again, he plays through new constellations that own a certain type of aesthetic. In my

eyes they are even poetic. But at the time it was incredibly difficult to get Emilio Prini to come here.

Did he not demand for everything to be rearranged very shortly before the first opening?

His works were kept under terrible conditions among drugs and weapons in an arsenal. Annette Gmeiner and her husband had rented a VW bus and simply packed the works. Then we called Emilio and asked him to help catalogue them. When he arrived in Berlin he loved the Zimmerstraße and really wanted to make a show. Although he had plenty of ideas, he rejected them all. He disliked the gallery floor and later criticized the lighting. The night before the opening Emilio went to the gallery once more. And then, the next day, I was totally shocked: Everything in the space was arranged just like it had been when it was first delivered. Then I took him aside and uttered that I would return in a few hours and that we would have to cancel the show unless it was installed by then. This seems to have impressed him: He proceeded to install the exhibition with an assistant.

According to what you say yourself, you collect away from the mainstream. How is this dissidence towards contemporary taste expressed in your collection?

This is not a linear collection. Although the main emphasis ranges from the 1960s and 70s to today, my special concern is content. The collection includes artists who were partly forgotten and who must be shown again. Among them is Franz-Erhard Walther who leads the viewers to new notions concerning the work. Or Jonathan Lasker in whose painting the material is absorbed both in the sense of paint and abstract sign, his so-called 'marks.' He introduces new perspectives into contemporary painting. Other artists who are central to the foundation include Fareed Armaly, Jack Goldstein, Josef Kramhöller, Anna Oppermann, and Emilio Prini.

Why did you discontinue the gallery and instead create the Kienzle Art Foundation?

I realized how fast and superficial everything is. It seems to me that an institution is better able to address content. Everything gets slowed down and that is important. Our exhibitions go on for extended periods of time. Thus we can offer interested parties the opportunity to talk to them. This is difficult to implement in a gallery. We are also interested in winning partners and in exchange with other institutions. The fundamental idea is that the foundation is an open system.

You criticize that most museums always show the same old names we all know so well.

I think museums do not fulfill their mission, which is to disseminate and to collect contemporary art as well. All they do is pursue trends and only rarely dare to make unpopular acquisitions. First with my gallery and since last year with the creation of the foundation, I am trying to support the other artists. It seems to me that museums increasingly turn into events themselves. And I am opposed to that.

Is this a structural problem in the art system or can the directors' characters be the reason?

Maybe that as well. The main problem is lack of funds. This is why the museums are dependent on the collectors. A good example here in Berlin is the Flick-Collection at the Hamburger Bahnhof. In my opinion what is going on there is quite suspicious. This event scam to bring animals to the museum and then offering to stay there for €1,000 per night.

You speak about Carsten Höller's show "Soma" at the Hamburger Bahnhof.

Now Berlin's Zoo must watch out to make sure it does not lose its public to the museum.

Thank you for the conversation, Jochen Kienzle.

Our moderator Jan Kage, alias Yaneq, is a sociologist who talks to artists and curators every Thursday at 7pm in his broadcast entitled "Radio Arty" on 100.6 MotorFM.

Kienzle Art Foundation, Bleibtreustraße 54, 10623 Berlin- Charlottenburg
"What a serious horror writing a play"

Opening April 1, 7pm, April 2-September 9, 2011. Mon-Sat 10am-6pm,
Sun 12noon-7pm

May 14, 7pm: Performance and discussion. Fabienne Audéoud - A lecture on my face www.kienzleartfoundation.de

<p><i>Interview: Jan Kage. Text: Kathrin Tobias, Hannah Nehb. Translation: Brian Poole</i></p>
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