

'Roast the Traitors!'

Chris Hammerlein at Schlachthaus.fresh&fine art
Press Release

The sculptor Chris Hammerlein comes from Cincinnati, Ohio. He worked and exhibited for many years in Los Angeles and New York, and for the past six years he has lived in Berlin and Cincinnati. Hammerlein is represented by galleries in New York and Brussels and in a broad range of collections, including the collection at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Hammerlein owes his fascination with myths, legends and the interwoven relationship of all cultures to his uncle, Thomas McEvilley, an internationally renowned art critic and expert in ancient cultures.

His ceramic sculptures, too, are informed by this fascination. They make an opulent and gaudily colorful impression. Though at first sight they appear cheerful, upon closer examination they break taboos of every imaginable and unimaginable kind.

Ceramic is not only a material used for making everyday practical objects; in Hammerlein's hands it becomes the material of legends. Primitive art began with the interaction between the elements of fire, water and earth. This is the primordial mixture of clay sculpture.

Hammerlein mixes the most varied visual worlds of the past out of clay, a material which can be used in such diverse ways. He interweaves Greek, Phoenician, Etruscan and Mexican paradigms. Clay, in its kneadable quality, becomes the polymorphic realm of the sea god Proteus, appearing in constant mutation. Blue wave crests curl into enormous tongues, as if straight out of a Hokusai woodcut. Christian crucifixes are enthroned on heathen Venus figures. Burlesque cherubs bite into the apple of sin with relish; the baroque and the rococo, in their joy in narration and their opulent wealth of forms, are sources of inspiration. And again and again there is a flash of literary history – from Greek myths such as Leda and the Swan, to Rabelais' adventurer, Pantagruel, through to the elegiac poems of the American cult poet Sylvia Plath.

The sculptor Chris Hammerlein is also a poet. And he is also a painter, as fulminant and unrestrained as a Baselitz, without any fear of pathos or kitsch, such as we see in art history in great mavericks like William Blake, Odilon Redon or Philip Guston. All the rules of academic art are broken: coherence, harmony, geometry. Picasso, Miró and Lucio Fontana are well known for having explored the artistic possibilities of ceramic sculpture for the first time in the modern age. In the present, it is artists such as Thomas Schütte and Markus Karstieß who are putting the inexhaustible possibilities of clay as a material to the test once again. Hammerlein's work sits alongside theirs.

In a peculiar way, works of art are the safes of history. A safe is a protected, secure place for the safekeeping of things of high value. But what do artworks keep safe?

Above all, the past. Many of them are the most apposite expression of the respective "zeitgeist", inscribing themselves on the memory of successive generations. They become reservoirs of memory, sources of our self-conception. To a certain extent, they are our coordinates in the present, plotted within the tension between the past and the future. We must therefore keep watch over them, so we do not lose our orientation.

Chris Hammerlein's works safeguard taboo-breaking across all periods. The artist skillfully breaks taboos with the habitual perceptions of our present. Taboo-breaking is not only a form of betrayal in the rule-governed world of art. This gives rise to the title – of both the preview dinner on St Martin's Day and the exhibition : Nip things in the bud and "Roast the traitors!"

With thanks to Kristin Strunz for her inspiration,
Stephan von Wiese and Constanze Kleiner
Berlin, 29.11.2018

CHRIS HAMMERLEIN

CV + Ausstellungsübersicht

CV

Vita

Born 1962, Cincinnati, Ohio
Lives and works in Berlin

Education

MFA, University of Cincinnati
BA, The New School, New York, NY
Boston University
Atelier Italia, Ronciglione
Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture

Austellungsübersicht (Auswahl)

Solo exhibitions

2018 „Rast the traitors“ (Bratet die Verräter“, Schlachthaus, Berlin, Germany
2016 'God Is My Only Friend', SWAC, Brussels, Belgium
2015 'It's A Wonderful World', SWAC, Brussels, Belgium
2014 'Hammerfest', Cruise & Callas, Berlin, Germany
2012 Cruise & Callas, Berlin, Germany
2008 Derek Eller Gallery, NY
2007 Arena México, Arte Contemporáneo, Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico
2006 Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY
2006 Kantor/Feuer Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
2000 "Hammer of the Gods", Universidad De Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico
Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY
1996 Dan Bernier Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
1995 "Skin and Bones", Amanda Obering Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA

Selected Group Exhibitions

2018 "Monomania", George Gallery Bushwick, NY
2018 "Touch Wood", Brussels Art Fair, Brussels, Belgium
2017 "Von Runter Der Marmorkippen", Kwadrat Galerie, Berlin, Germany
2017 "All My Heroes", SWAC, Brussels Art Fair, Brussels, Belgium
2016 "Only Lovers", Le Core, Paris
2016 'Green Doesn't Sell', SWAC, Brussels Art Fair, Brussels, Belgium

2015 "Ngoro Ngoro", Berlin, Germany

2015 Brussels Art Fair, Cruise & Callas, SWAC, Brussels, Belgium

2008 "How To Cook A Wolf: Part One," Dinter Fine Art, New York, NY "Summer Group Exhibition,"
Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY

2007

"Neolntegrity", curated by Keith Mayerson, Derek Eller Gallery, New York, NY

Tease", Mireille Mosler Ltd., New York, NY

"Don't Look", The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

"Hard Times", Jeff Bailey Gallery, New York, NY

2006

"Transformer", curated by Jovi Schnell, Donna Beam Fine Art Gallery, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV (upcoming)

"Drawing III", g-module, Paris, France

2005 "Looking at Words: The Formal Presence of Text in Modern and Contemporary Works on Paper", Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, NY

"Viviseccion. Dibujo contemporaneo", Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil, Mexico

2004

"Termite Art Against White Elephant: Present Behaviour in Drawing", Fundacion ICO, Madrid, Spain

2003

"Brooklyn Bounce & The Cootie Catcher", The Beaker Gallery,
Tampa, FL

"The Company We Keep", Inman Gallery, Houston, TX

"Zounds", Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL

2002

"Pop Patriotism", Momena, Brooklyn, NY

"The Empire Strikes Back", ATM Gallery, New York, NY

2001

"Three Project Rooms", In Arco, Torino, Italy

2000

"Il Contratto del Disegnatore", In Arco, Torino, Italy

"Greater New York", P.S.1, New York, NY

Public Collections

Museum of Modern Art, NY

Walker Art Center, MN

Artist Statement

'Roasting the Traitors'

The use of an elemental material of such as clay for figurative narrative purpose in Chris Hammerlein's work is deliberate. Clay is earth mixed with water fire and air, the classical four elements composing the universe. Clay is a material with intrinsic contradictions; it is both a utilitarian and a decorative material, before it is fired it is malleable when wet, brittle when dry, after firing it is both fragile and the most resilient of materials. The sculptures on exhibition use the earth playfully with serious intent. The child plays with his feces surprising himself with his first sculpture.

In the course of human folly we forget that we are part of the world, that we are animals. We struggle with the animal elements in our character, separating ourselves from the natural order by philosophical and religious constructs and conceptions, ignorant of real purpose, largely indifferent to our effect as we flail about in self-absorption and base appetites, thinking that we have risen to a man-made heaven, above the raw, chthonic laws of Nature with our Religion of Man, Man as Baby God.

Cute cannibalistic cupids devour the earth. They spill from the apple of original sin, tumbling like helpless worms from its gnawed core, babies innocent in their ignorance. These days, as the natural world crumbles, the cookie crumbles and we continue to eat it, we have to. We are hungry babies. Wah.

On this St Martins Day, we Roast the Traitors, we eat the “canaries in the coal mine”, the honking geese of environmental alarm are silenced, those annoying geese who betray us, will be served up with onions, carrots and potatoes. Informed by Hindu art as well as Greek and Baroque sculpture and painting along with a dose of Romantic nature worship through Henri Rousseau, William Blake and George Stubbs, Hammerlein’s Theater of Clay engages with uncomfortable scenarios turgid with emotion and humor.

Our goose is cooked! Let’s eat!

Chris Hammerlein / 11.11.2018