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BÖHLITZER ART FASCINATES IN EUROPE

The artist Stephan Reichmann draws attention with extraordinary art throughout Europe. He associates puppets with painting and also addresses death and destruction in his works. For example in his picture "La Guerre", which is based on an original by Henri Rousseau

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DANCING WITH THE DOLLS

Frau Pupp doktor Pille, Augsburger Puppenkiste or the good old doll's house - they all appeal to children. But dolls are not pure infatuation. Even artists love dolls. For painter Stephan Reichmann from Böhlitz near Leipzig they are not only favorite toys - if need be, he even goes to war with them

Stephan Reichmann paints less with a brush than with dolls. 700 of them wait in the attic studio to be staged by him. For him dolls are not sweet creatures that would only be caressed. Dolls are his tools. He needs them like hairdressers their scissors, the blacksmith its hammer, the child its sandpit. His molds are the forms, but especially the colours. Henri Rousseau's world-famous original "La Guerre" is more in muted colors. In Stephan Reichmann's picture of the same name, however, a doll rides

across the battlefield in screaming colours. Is that allowed? Or better: Is he allowed? "I think so," exclaims Stephan Reichmann. "Undisputed, war means death and destruction. You can see that in my painting too. Let's just take the puppet theater. Is a sentence worth less, just because Kaspar says it and not the teacher at school with a raised finger? "

These are themes like life and death, storm and urge, loyalty and betrayal that interest him. As the storyteller sends the wolf and the seven little



goats into the race, the fabulist his rabbit and the hedgehog - so Stephan Reichmann uses the dolls to tell stories. Just these days the painter is back from Amsterdam, where he showed his works in the context of the World AIDS congress. And of course, they were dolls that brought him closer to HIV. Dolls are more articulate than humans, and better master the balancing act between the perceived all-clear in the West, drama in Africa, and ignorance in Russia. >>

It is hard to believe that a world citizen like Reichmann, who worked in Hamburg, relaxed in Bali and modeled in London moved to the Saxon province, voluntarily, to the Wurzener Land. "Why not? The woods, the fields, the mountains, the hills - I feel good here. It has something that people here rather go to the tangible, not so much the head load. A perfect balance to Berlin, where I live in the cold season. "25 years ago, the young Leipziger came to countryside. With his business partner Uli Leybold he bought the orphaned farm and wanted to make a hotel out of it. In the end, that failed for financial reasons. No, he never wanted to be an unemployed artist, says Stephan Reichmann, the son of a bookseller and a Leipzig's opera singer. From a very young age he has painted, with the theater make-up of his father, conspicuously "grown-up", preferably character heads. He studied business administration, did copywriting and was a PR freak, as he calls it. In Frankfurt am Main, he worked as a press officer for a corporation, to be later hired by headhunters to Berlin. He was one of the ten people who worked in the Berlin office of Startup Booking.com. "Today, this is a worldwide success with thousands of employees." He is still do

ghostwriting and copywriting, writes speeches and press releases. Above all, he paints. He, who loves the city, exhibits in Leipzig as well as in Munich, Dusseldorf or Berlin. In Bremen, his work was on the occasion of "25 years of the fall of the Berlin Wall" to see. And again it is the colour that he opposes to everyday gray. His art is in demand. He is East German, from Leipzig, who had experienced the Monday demonstrations up close. He is political, but not everyday political.

Böhlitz has long since become a home to him. And yet, the beginning was hard: "When I arrived here with my friend, some villagers thought we were buying everything up and doing big business. That changed after we invited our neighbors and celebrated with them. The Frog Quarter Event was born, which for a quarter of a century has always been hosted by another family. Mayor Thomas Pöge is happy about the lived neighborhood in the "Froschviertel": "That's popularly said, because the area was swampy and had some ponds with lot of frogs." His open yard and open door philosophy are important to Stephan Reichmann. Others offer potatoes, eggs or apples - just tangible! - art lovers can see at his not so top-heavy pictures in his barn.

He likes to explain his techniques. And they have it all. So he not only paints, he also photographs and alienates. He makes ludicrous use of the art market and builds winking details that already exist. Theoretically, he could combine Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa with the ears of Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse and the Praying Hands of Albrecht Dürer. But without his dolls, nothing or almost nothing works. Because he also likes to paint landscapes, which he finds sufficient in Wurzen and the surrounding area. As modern as he paints, he also sells. His works are listed on the internet. On a platform that is open to artists worldwide, he has uploaded 350 of his paintings. The taste of the customers is quite amazing. It is not the landscape pictures that go away, but the work with the dolls, says Reichmann.

His next exhibition is coming up: In Berlin, he will show 30 portrait photos, portraits of double-sized dolls and standardized as for the passport. As if they wanted to travel. But do not worry, the dolls stay at his studio. They are just as down to earth as the artist himself.

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Der Böhlitzer Bauernhof des Künstlers, in dem sich ein Atelier und ein Schaudepot befinden. Hier lebt und arbeitet der 48-Jährige.

Foto: Privat



Künstler Stephan Reichmann beim abendlichen Plausch im Garten seines Böhlitzer Hauses.

Foto: Inga Lischman



Reges Interesse bei der Ausstellung des Künstlers im Rahmen des diesjährigen Welt-Aids-Kongresses in Amsterdam.

Foto: Privat

THE DOLL IN ART

For artists dolls have been popular and important objects to express themselves for centuries. For example, in painting it is found as Oskar Kokoschka's "Self-Portrait with a Doll" or in the field of sculpture as Dada dolls by Hannah Höch from the 1920s. Likewise, we meet the lifelike, lifeless beings in the film, as in Fritz Lang's famous "Metropolis" or in music, for example in Offenbach's opera "The Tales of Hoffmann". So even outside their actual purpose, dolls lead a lively life of their own, as they actually belong as playmates in the children's room or as mannequins in the fashion department of stores. Why is that? The simple answer: Artists can use dolls to portray people in all their good and bad qualities. Because dolls are similar to humans, they are after his image and created by himself. Dolls always reflect the time that they came from. Because facial

expression, body measurements and posture, as well as clothing and accessories are transformed according to the generally accepted concept of morality and lifestyle. So in a baby doll from the 1940s, we can not recognize anything childish anymore. Body, hairstyle and facial expression are too severe, too "grown-up". And much more critically, we look at today about the Barbies of the US toy manufacturer Mattel. Due to the overlong legs and her wasp-thin waist we see mediated our children a wrong, unhealthy body ideal. What kind of dolls the painters, filmmakers and photographers tell us their magical, fantastic or socially critical stories might be different. They either create the dolls for their own works or use existing materials such as Barbies, baby dolls and mannequins.

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