

HANS & HELGA

Marcus Graf interviews Rudolf Reiber:

**Marcus Graf: Could you please describe with a few sentences your work that you have shown at the exhibition.**

**What is it about and what were its formal parameters as well as conceptual issues that you were interested in?**

Rudolf Reiber: So let's begin with „German Skies“, which is a work in three parts, consisting of three monochrome dull painted plates of aluminium. The three colours, „Sky Blue“, „Sky Grey“ and „Sky“ are exactly the colour shades of the planes the Royal Air Force used in World War II to bomb German cities. The bottoms of the bombers were painted with these colours to camouflage them in the German sky.

For „Unter vier Augen“, in English maybe best translated as „tête-à-tête“, I compiled excerpts from internet pornography and set them to the rhythm of a waltz in the soundtrack. So what I did was sample portraits of the performers, or rather: of the moments they gaze into the camera. Those gazes are meant for the viewer and suggest he could be part of the ostensibly joyful experience. The video, when installed in public, can only be seen through a peephole in the wood panelling that closes off a recess in the facade.

Finally „Untitled“ is a polished one-euro coin. I ground a Greek one Euro coin with sandpaper until the coin's image was erased. Then I gave it a high polish, which reflects the observer. At the end, the question arises, how much the coin is still worth.

**M.G.: Let us talk a bit about “German Sky”. In this work, you use minimal monochrome painting for dealing with an important part of Germany's history. At the same time, the translocation from the airplanes to the art-panels gives the work**

**a sense of irony. How important is it for you that the spectator knows about the meaning and history of the colours?**

R.R.: First of all, I think every work should function without any commentary, and I hope „German Skies“ does so too. To achieve this I especially cared for the surface and the quality of the colours. I painted, sanded, repainted and sanded them again and again until they got this really smooth surface with the colour still looking dull. The result was that if you are looking from aside, they really appear shiny, but if you are standing in front of them, you can't find your reflection in it. This is what everyone can experience without any knowledge about the origin of the colours or any knowledge in art history.

But of course most of the conceptual art today needs a kind of explanation, especially for spectators who are not so aware of the discussions and their histories. However everybody who is aware of the history in modern art will compare the panels with the monochromes of Malewitsch, Rodtchenko, Rauschenberg and so on, but will be surprised by the „unclean“ colours.

And then there is the title, which could give a solution, but seems to be just another trap as the colours don't look like colours of the sky.

So, I think one should have a free look on the panels, but also have the opportunity to find out more about the background of the colours, which could be given through a publication like this and a handout given for free by the gallery.

**M.G.: I love this work, because it is a very current and appropriate way of how art can deal with history and its politics. I understand this work as subversively engaged without being didactic. How important is social or political engagement in your work? What kind of possibilities do you see for art being socially interested and active?**

R.R.: I like it how you call the work subversive without being didactic. And being didactic is exactly what I am trying to avoid.

But actually I don't like my work being described as political. Especially not the „Skies“. I never wanted to blame the British for bombing Germany, or construct a revisionist history. Besides I don't like most of this so called „political“ or „engaged“ art these days. Most of it is in my opinion too didactic and boring. For instance, when I encounter works in an exhibition that seem to belong more to social documentary, I feel like I'm back in school,

when I had to endure all these ambition films shown by my R.E. teacher. Not that I don't like these sort of films, but I prefer to watch them on TV. And there are plenty of them, just better made. I think art never has changed the world.

But there are exceptions like for example Francis Alys. Particularly like his poetic approach, and I hope you can find this in my „political“ works as well.

**M.G.: Often, like we see it in the three pieces in the exhibition, irony and humour are an integral part of your work.**

R.R.: I love irony, because you can deal with heavy subjects without being too moral and it is an easy way to catch the audience.

**M.G.: Discussing the formal side of your work, it seems to be very deeply influenced by minimal art.**

R.R.: Is it? Well, it evolved quiet early in my work that I tried to concentrate on the essential. Rather trying to omit than to add something. „Untitled“ is an early example of it. I have sanded and polished it until it reveals it's true character. And so I did in many of my later works, but I would not call this minimal art. And talking about „German Skies“, I would rather call them an ironic commentary about minimal art.

**M.G.: Coming now to “Unter vier Augen”. The work deals with presentation and voyeurism. Still, you do not expose any manual for the spectator, and do not impose any message. What was the starting point of this work?**

R.R.: I developed this piece for an exhibition, which should spread all over a nice little village in southern Germany called Ettlingen. There was a competition where I was asked to create a work for the public. And of course, they were thinking about something nice. So I thought what do they expect from me and what is really lovely. A naked well figured female body, that's what you can see displayed in bronze or stone all over as public art. So I thought about public, nudity and voyeurism and created something they were not expecting.

**M.G.: Besides your video works, also often in your three dimensional pieces and objects like “Untitled”, you integrate the spectator. What role does he play in your work?**

R.R.: He plays a big part in my work. Generally speaking, there is no art without a spectator. What's an artwork without being seen or discussed? It just doesn't exist!

„Untitled“ or „Unter vier Augen“ could be seen as perfect examples as they are not finished until you see your reflection in the coin or kneel down in front of the girls.

And I like to play with the viewers expectations and prejudices. I think an artist does not even do half of the job, the rest should lay on people like you, critics, art historians, curators and the audience. It's your questions, comments and answers make our art feel alive!