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OLAF NICOLAI

Considering a multiplicity of appearances in light of a particular aspect of relevance.

Or: Can art be concrete?

20 April – 14 July 2007

From Tuesday to Saturday from 2 to 7 pm or by appointment

Opening Friday 20 April 2007 6 - 10 pm

Erna Hecey is pleased to present Berlin-based artist Olaf Nicolai's first solo show in Brussels, "Considering a multiplicity of appearances in light of a particular aspect of relevance. Or: Can art be concrete?"

In his artistic practice, Olaf Nicolai utilizes everyday objects and cultural products as well as historical references. "Questions of form, moods, attitudes and style are not just vain play with surfaces. They are questions of organizational forms of activities," writes the artist. Nicolai's impressive and often surprising installations combine current questions in politics and contemporary culture with a wide-ranging interest in the natural sciences, architecture, aesthetics, iconography, and history. His focus is on the construction and exploration of new aesthetic contexts, often playing with the difference between naturalness and artificiality. His works are well known for both their conceptual complexity and striking physical beauty.

For his exhibition at Erna Hecey Olaf Nicolai presents an ensemble of new work. The central installation "Considering a multiplicity of appearances in light of a particular aspect of relevance. Or: Can art be concrete?" consists of a series of 16 framed multicolored prints together with 400 color books laid out on worktables. The colors of these offset prints blend into each other, an effect that is created using a special printer in which one color is fed at a time. This process is inspired by the technique of Iris prints, named after a specific kind of printer originally designed to make test copies for high quality print jobs. Each print, though produced using a mechanical process, is an original, owing to variations in the ink flow. The framed prints and books form a single series, a multiplicity of unique appearances: the framed pieces consist of the first eight and last eight prints made, the books all the variations of color in between.

On the gallery walls are affixed 3 large-scale Italian revolutionary prints, that together spell out the phrase "...ma l'amore mio non muore" (But my love does not die). These brilliant examples of radical leftist aesthetics, drawn from a seventies book, were originally printed using the same color process as the Iris prints: bluish purple fades into green, orange becomes purple. This printing method creates an atmosphere of glamour and psychedelic fun that is associated with political radicalism, specifically Maoism. Nicolai's offset prints play with and question the relation between pure form and technique and content in political art.

In "Ce qui coupe une ligne, c'est le point" (What cuts a line is a point), Olaf turns from Marxism to that other major 'revolutionary science' of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis. The title comes from the

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famous French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's twentieth seminar *Encore* (given at approximately the same time as the Italian Maoist book). Lacan was fascinated with topological figures like the Möbius strip and the torus, and in his later work turned to the mathematical theory of knots in order to formalize the twists and turns of the unconscious. Nicolai offers a neon 'knot' sculpture based on Lacan's topological diagrams from the seventies, following the particular iconography of French psychoanalysis. Ironically, Lacan's highly formalistic rendering of the psyche can be seen as addressing the same processes presented in a much more colorful and 'pop' fashion in the Maoist posters. But whereas the Maoist aesthetic seems to celebrate the free desire of the individual and never-ending love, Lacan's diagrams entail a complex and 'knotty' structure that cannot be simplified without falling apart...

In the project space, Nicolai presents "Psyché I-V," a series of five sculptural objects, reminiscent of fun-house mirrors, made of polished stainless steel which together form a pentagon.

Olaf Nicolai is one of the most important artists of his generation. He has had numerous solo shows, the most recent including *THE BLONDES*, Stadtraum Eppendingen (2007) ; *La Lotta*, Galerie EIGEN+ART, Leipzig (2006) ; Leonhardi Museum, Dresden (2006) ; Kunstraum Dornbirn (2006) ; Printed Matter, New York, USA (2005) ; *Odds and Ends*, Projektraum enter, Kunstmuseum Thun, Schweiz (2004) ; *Odds and Ends*, Lindenau Museum Altenburg (2004) ; *Privacy: A programme of symposia*, Protoacademy, Edinburgh, Schottland (2004).

His most recent participation in groups shows include *HALF SQUARE, HALF CRAZY*, Centre National d'Art Contemporain of the Villa Arson (2007) ; *Modelle für Morgen*, European Kunsthalle Köln (2007) ; *Wiederaufbau Flamme der Revolution*, Städtischen Galerie Wolfsburg (2007) ; *Urban Intervention*, Luxembourg et Grande Region, Capitale Européenne de la culture (2007) ; *The Freak show*, Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon (2007) ; *Nature Design*, Museum für gestaltung, Zürich (2007) ; *Ordnung + Verführung*, Haus Konstruktiv, Zurich, Switzerland (2006) ; *Play station*, Sprengel Museum Hannover (2006), *This is america,!*, Central Museum Utrecht, Netherlands (2006) ; *mozart 06*, Salzburg, Austria (2006) ; *Das große Rasenstück*, Nuremberg (2006), *Football exhibition*, Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, Brasil (2006) ; *Location Shots*, Erna Hécey Gallery, Brussel, Belgium (2006) ; *Biennale de Lyon*, France (2007).

A special dossier was dedicated to Olaf Nicolai's work in Parkett 78 (2006).