

«Sommervögel»
12.06. - 24.07.2021

Joachim Bandau, Heike Kati Barath, Sabian Baumann, Reto Boller, Dave Bopp, Manuel Etterli, Anne Fellner, Urs Frei, Katharina Grosse, Marcia Hafif, Samuel Haitz, Svetlana Heger, Thomas Julier, Martín Mele, Judy Millar, Patrick Rohner, Fabian Treiber, Markus Weggenmann

“A wonderful bird . . . Sitting there very comfortably. At first, I didn't know that there are only around four poisonous birds. Or that the albatross sleeps while flying. And that blue-footed boobies like to dance. Knowing that, that's life experience.”

- *Manuel Etterli, this is a very complex topic that misses a lot of points*

This summer, a vital, inviting mix of various paintings, photography, and sculptural works by eighteen contemporary artists is on view at Galerie Mark Müller: a wide range of works encounter chairs, sofas, tables, a carpet, and a bookshelf. We can effortlessly explore the exhibition sitting or lying down, we can lean back for once to recharge and surrender ourselves to the vibrant colors of the two gallery spaces. The exhibition situation might be unusual, but the relaxed domestic feel offers possible perspectives of the private surroundings that provide most artworks their permanent home. Surrounded by this broad spectrum of works, we can explore the world of collecting and exhibiting, casting a gaze on its varied history.

The need to collect has always been inherent to human nature. At the same time, it belongs to the founding topos of the places that we today associate with more or less public access to art. They are places in which the exhibited artworks and their respective creators are located at the very center of thematic and formal events. Since the late 1920s, the concept of the white cube has shaped our perception of the exhibition display to such an extent that the current norm continues to be large, reticent exhibition spaces, where the given color-neutral architecture retreats decidedly behind the artworks presented. In the sense of an autonomization of art, the original concept behind the white cube foresaw an ideal space for an art that is independent of all social influences, a space in which it can be received as such. Beginning in the 1960s, institutional critique took a stance in art and theory against this dramatic hermeticism and heightened aestheticization. While the white cube thus came to be seen as a symbol of the alienation of artists from society, the typical quiet of a reduced exhibition display today remains largely the status quo. At the same time, interventions and experiments on an artistic level at least in part challenge this normative form of exhibition.

Over the centuries, modalities of collecting and exhibiting have been subject to fundamental changes. New artistic and institutional impulses were and still are accompanied by corresponding developments that unavoidably reorganized the requirements and ordering structures of “showing art.” But if we take a look at the past, several individual concepts can be made out that could serve as a countermodel to the current approach.

The emergence of collecting as a recognized practice, where different objects were bought together in physical space, can be traced back to the sixteenth century. At the time, concepts like the chamber or cabinet of curiosities, *studiolo* or *musaeum* spread in the Western world to describe private spaces in which artistic, natural or

wonderous objects and artefacts were arranged and studied. The Renaissance *Wunderkammer* was a distinctive form of presenting what was frequently a royal collection with a claim to encyclopedic completeness. Their emblematic principles of order foresaw that the immanently concealed correlations between the curiosities were emphasized. Although some of the objects were indeed precious, their true value inhered in their specific arrangement and the relationships to one another. With the Cartesian world view, these “irrational” private collections were increasingly replaced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by principles of differentiation and classification. The French Revolution leveled the requirements for the emergence of a new rationality, resulting in a new institution: the public museum.

From the current point of view, the mixing of artistic practices in the spirit of the chamber of curiosities brings together a variety of objects and techniques to create installations, exhibitions, and a cultural hybridity that clearly emancipates itself from classical genres and categorization, like decorative and fine art. Beyond mere nostalgia, the scope of the cabinet of curiosities seems self-evident in view of our unsystematic age, for the obliteration of boundaries and the combination of various objects independent of space, time, form, and content exudes a certain fascination in the twenty-first century as well. The interaction of the various works, pieces of furniture, materials, surfaces, and colors allows us to explore them to our own liking and perceive them at our own speed, sitting on the sofa. We discover commonalities and contrasts that take place beyond a formulated narrative or a temporal sequence. Galerie Mark Müller becomes a place of summer rest, of exchange, experience, and enjoyment. We can approach the works however we like, free as a summer bird.

Marlene Bürgi