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Michael Wesely

Still-Lives

March 30 – April 29, 2007

In today's art, beauty - the idealistic aesthetic dream - is generally no more than sarcasm. Few other descriptive categories are rejected as vehemently as that of "beauty". Even Kant refers to sensualism with little respect when it is a matter of beauty and in Marx' writing beauty is - at best - no more than a sedative for the petit-bourgeois masses (and for women). Instead, the utopia of Modernism showed itself in imageless sublimity - or at least that was the theory. However, one should not permit oneself to be misled by discourse. The new still-lives by Michael Wesely shown in Galerie Fahnemann demonstrate the presence of both beauty and the sublime today.

This series of flower portraits, as yet incomplete, is a further stage in Wesely's persistent investigation into photographic reproduction as a temporal phenomenon. In these images he captures the blossoming and fading of flowers using exposures of five to ten days. The resulting images become memory stores with great aesthetic appeal due to their egalitarian reproduction of all phenomena. In these shots, time appears less a vectorial phenomenon than the result of spatial relations. Indeed, a time lag is inscribed into the images by the rhythm and perspective layering of the delicate, spectrally transparent petals and the stems in their whirring dance; they not only give the pictorial space more depth, but also extend the visual time necessary for every perception quite tangibly. In this way, Wesely succeeds in breaching the primacy that applies in his medium - that of the right moment - in favour of the history picture, which is, however, subject to an entirely new interpretation here.

In Wesely's new photographs, this pictorial genre - characterised as a moving scene featuring numerous figures in a unified pictorial space, which should also include a time lag - merges with that of the allegory. It is less a matter of portraying nature as an allegorical attempt to defeat the finite, in the usual manner, and more about the role of the highly-detailed flower portraits of the 16th and 17th centuries. These were the basis for botanical research and facilitated exchange between botanists and flower collectors. But their most important function was that of an auction catalogue, for first and foremost, the illustrated flowers were a status symbol and a commercial asset. They reflected the wealth, not only of their individual owners, but of an entire aspiring class. All their new forms and colours stood for man's dominion over creation in general and more specifically for the global power of Europe's seafaring nations, which were beginning to divide up Africa, the Americas and parts of Asia as sources of raw materials at that time.

We know that the lively trade with exotic flowers triggered a positive voracity for bulbs of the family *hyacinthus orientalis*; in other words, for narcissi, irises, anemones and tulips - and the tremendous crash of this tulipomania in 1637 is also common knowledge. Only the flower pictures emerged unscathed from this destruction of huge wealth, proving immune to financial speculation. This resistance to any form of appropriation is reflected Michael Wesely's still-lives, which retain an unusual autonomy despite their dense content. The artist directs the purpose and tribulations of classical pictorial composition into a synthesis of form and content that broadens our horizons, while almost imperceptibly eliminating the viewer's superfluous fixation on experimental photographic techniques.

Susanne Prinz