

TANYA LEIGHTON

PRESS RELEASE

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ROBERT AND TRIX HAUSSMANN
FRIEDRICH KUHN

In collaboration with Herald St, London

2 May - 28 June 2014

Preview: Friday, 2 May, 6-9 pm

Gallery Weekend Berlin: 2 - 4 May

Tanya Leighton and Herald St, London are pleased to announce a collaborative exhibition featuring the work of Friedrich Kuhn and Robert and Trix Haussmann. This is the first time that the notorious, post-war Swiss artist and the 2013 Swiss Grand Prix Design winning couple have been shown alongside each other, despite their longstanding friendship, philosophical similarities and geographic proximity.

Having lived his entire life in Switzerland – before his untimely death in 1972 at the age of 46 – Friedrich Kuhn's pioneering experiments in painting, sculpture, collage and printmaking are only beginning to become known outside of his home country. Kuhn was self-taught, purposefully muddying his personal history and casting himself as Switzerland's bohemian. A spectacle and regular on the scenes of Zurich, Bern and Lucerne, Kuhn remained unplaceable outside of the unstable rumours and gossip which defined him (and to which he actively contributed). Despite this eccentric isolationism, Kuhn's legacy retains a decidedly non-provincial position. His oeuvre demonstrates the characteristics of an artist grappling with and shaping the artistic tenants of post-modernism. Seeking self-actualization over subscription to a narrow critical doctrine, Kuhn's idiosyncratic artworks demand empathy from his viewers and reward proportionally.

Robert and Trix Haussmann began collaborating in Zurich shortly after their marriage in 1965 – together seeking a novel alternative to the rigid *form follows function* dogma of design in an era disrupted by global redefinition. Instead of the Bauhaus, the pair has long looked to Mannerist tendencies of the 16th century, incorporating the ornamental, exaggeration of form and anamorphosis. The couple coined the term 'Manierismo Critico' to encompass their oppositional program, defined by the Haussmanns as '[...] taking up lost tradition, pursuing its further development and giving it a contemporary new interpretation – combined with humour and last, but not least, a touch of self-mockery'.

This intently researched investigation into classical architecture and design is apparent in all of the Haussmanns' output, particularly the 'Lehrstücke' ('Teaching Items'), a series of sculptures and models that serve – in lieu of a written manifesto – as illustrations of 'Manierismo Critico'. Among these objects is a faux Roman column with radial drawers that destroy the object's visual harmony when in use. Another is a

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vener and mirror inlaid pillar; illusionistically designed to resemble a simple geometric bookshelf, the face of the cabinet is a functionless trompe l'oeil. The shelving is hidden behind its elaborate doors.

Two examples of the Haussmanns' 'Lehrstücke' are on display at the gallery in the form of segmented mirrors, framed in ornate wood, which create illusionistic space while reflecting the actual space around them. Opposite an arched Haussmann 'Lehrstücke' hangs a large canvas by Kuhn from 1962; packed with varied painting languages the work straddles figuration and abstraction. Only after a few moments of scrutiny does the painting reveal itself to be dotted with painted flies and bugs. A chair sculpture by Kuhn is installed on the gallery floor below: an anthropomorphic, sprawling construction, robbed entirely of its functionality, instead becoming either a frolicking or writhing body. Fittingly, the Haussmanns first collaboration was a non-functioning chair, its legs and backrest made solely of neon tubing.

Kuhn's chair is echoed in the upper gallery, where a mirrored couch and easy chairs designed by the Haussmanns reflect their surroundings: screen prints by Kuhn, populated with patterned palm trees in an array of colors. Imagined fauna was a regular subject of Kuhn's and by the late 1960s he embraced the palm tree as a reoccurring motif, perhaps a personification of himself. Just like Kuhn's outlandish persona – fueled by the public he amused and antagonized – the intrigue of the palm tree is a product of societal mythologization. In 1968 Kuhn held his most wildly appreciated exhibition, 'Palmenausstellung' on Zollikerstraße in Zurich. The four screen prints and a small painting from this period are on view in the gallery, marking the last development in Kuhn's career before his death four years later.

Seen together for the first time, the work of Robert and Trix Haussmann and Friedrich Kuhn reveals not just two spirited artistic positions, but also a kinship in idiosyncrasy. These are artists whose work unflinchingly questions stylistic norms, material specificity and taste itself, while never betraying their own passion for artistic exploration.

For further details contact info@tanyaleighton.com or telephone +49 (0)30221607770. The gallery is open Tuesday – Saturday, 11-6pm and by appointment.