

GALERIE ANDREA CARATSCH

PRESS RELEASE

WALTER DAHN: WORKS FROM THE '80s

28 AUGUST 2014 – 28 NOVEMBER 2014

From 28 August to 28 November 2014, Galerie Andrea Caratsch will be showing an overview of the work of Walter Dahn from the 1980s.

Walter Dahn was born on 8 October 1954 in St. Tönis near Krefeld, Germany. From 1971 to 1977 he studied at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he was the youngest master-scholar of Joseph Beuys. Beginning in 1979, along with Peter Adamski, Peter Bömmels and Georg Dokoupil, he formed the group Mülheimer Freiheit, a loose association of artists who were among the most prominent forces behind the "Jungen Wilden" movement in the 1980s. Dahn exhibited works with these artists in galleries and museums throughout Germany. In 1982 he took part in Documenta 7 in Kassel as well as the exhibition *Zeitgeist* at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin. Around this time, he began to move away from the Mülheimer Freiheit group and establish himself as a "solo artist." Since then, his works have been shown in numerous exhibitions in Europe, Japan and the United States. In 1995 Dahn was appointed professor of painting at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste in Braunschweig. He lives and works in Cologne.

Walter Dahn describes the Mülheimer Freiheit as a mixture of "an insane asylum, a kindergarten and an art school"¹ that was defined by a common attitude: a radical conceptual and formal openness with a humorous and playful deconstruction of all norms, preconceptions and assumptions for art in the 1970s, Minimal Art and Conceptual Art. In this context, an enormous artistic breakthrough took place, which is thoroughly documented in this exhibition with Dahn's works from 1981 to 1983, as exemplified by *Aus Schuhen werden Krokodile* (1981). At this time, Dahn maintained a close working relationship and friendship with Dokoupil. Dahn illustrates the conflicting nature of these relationships very bluntly in the works *Hör genau zu* (1981), *Portrait Dokoupil* (1983) and *Flames of Friendship* (1983). The vehemence of his discourse, both in content and form, led to the "bad painting aesthetic" that continues to influence an entire generation of artists to this day.

Dahn's works from the late 1980s evidence a gradual and then increasingly radical turn away from dramatic, thickly applied paint. On the other hand, these works are characterized by an increasingly simple technique of representation that emphasizes the subject matter and not painting itself. Looking back, Dahn says: "The best thing that I did is when I stopped painting in order to paint and made my first screen print." The starting point and templates for these works were collections of his own earlier drawings, articles, caricatures, reference works on art history and anthropology, and much more. The selection of subjects seems superficial and arbitrary; instead, the drawing—or the act of drawing in its symbolic function—is the focus of his artistic efforts. Assemblages of religious symbols (*Afrikanische Dreifaltigkeit* and *Die natürliche Dreifaltigkeit*, both 1986) contrast with an ironic attempt to reduce life and art to scientific formulas (*Exakt erweiterte Naturwissenschaften*, 1986) and the caricature as art (*Atelier*, 1988).

When Richard Prince asked Dahn about his numerous styles, his answer was very definite: "The content did never change (*sic*)." This is not "l'Art pour l'Art." It is about content, wherever it may lie.

The gallery is open from Tuesday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

¹ Richard Prince, "Interview with Walter Dahn," in *Journal of Contemporary Art*, 1994, vol. 7, no. 1, pp.112–127; www.cja-online.com/dahn