

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

Press release
September 2019

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder

September 1 to October 5, 2019
Opening on Saturday, August 31, 12 to 2 pm
Maag Areal, Zahnradstr. 21, CH-8005 Zurich

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present the gallery's seventh solo exhibition by the Swiss artist Jean-Frédéric Schnyder.

Beginning with experimental objects created within the context of Pop Art in the late 1960s, Schnyder (born in 1945 in Bern) has created a significant oeuvre encompassing photography, sculpture, painting, objects, and installation. Highly conceptual, his works are also fundamentally disparate. In the early 1970s, he created his first paintings and has since produced a vast quantity of small-format series.

In 1972, Schnyder took part in Documenta 5, and his work was presented in the Individual Mythologies section. There, he contributed a collection of ten folders with the title *Farbstufe weiß-violett in 1000 Tönen* (*Color level white-violet in 1000 shades*). Meticulously exploring and portraying the ordinary rather than the extraordinary is typical of the artist's later works. In the 1980s, Schnyder created a series of 128 vedutas around Bern (*Berner Veduten*), where he appropriated works by local artists such as Ferdinand Hodler while simultaneously performing the role of a whimsical artist being confronted by pedestrians' comments. This absurdly methodical serial painting technique was continued in a string of everyday depictions, such as of public benches, waiting rooms in railway stations, and views from motorway overpasses. These works state the obvious in a naïve manner, juxtaposing the banal and the heroic through an almost classical arrangement of motifs informed by traditional techniques. For instance, a painting of a large red truck crossing a road is the immortalization of a random and inconsequential highway occurrence.

In Schnyder's revival of *plein air* painting, the captured moment always includes the artist standing behind his easel, looking at the scenes he is painting. In so doing, his work becomes an uncertain search for the ordinary, while being reminiscent of the repetitive, daily routine of craftsmanship.

For this exhibition, Schnyder has created a series of 26 grouped works titled *kleine Bilder* (*small pictures*). Each work consists of 6 small paintings and is named for an alphabet letter, e.g. *kleine Bilder (A)*. The individual canvases are presented in cardboard boxes, which are then placed together into another box. All 156 oil-on-plywood pictures were painted using a grid and bring to mind pixelated, low-resolution, digital images. They resemble pictograms and let the viewer anticipate a schematic representation of well-known objects. Even so, not every painting represents a concrete object and some depict nothing but an abstract pattern.

Flowers, sunsets, traditional Swiss houses, and interiors are long-time features of Schnyder's visual lexicon. In his earlier works, these architectural motifs were mostly painted in a realistic style full of allusions to art history. The flowers on show are an obvious act of self-quotation, namely of a flower Schnyder painted in the 1990s. The flowers playfully connect the emerging digital world of the 1990s with the analog world of painting.

Sculptures made out of banana boxes are on view alongside the paintings: architectural studies of skyscrapers, small houses resembling huts, a collection of churches, and an abstract cityscape. The sculpture *CHIQUITA*, also made out of boxes, is fixed by appendant brackets containing jewelry-like objects. Another work on show is the installation *Hüter der Schwelle* (*Keeper of the threshold*), which is also constructed out of fruit boxes. The installation consists of 22 parts and fills an entire room.

The skyscraper sculpture is another self-quotation, this time of the work *Empire State Building* from 1971, a model of the building made of Lego bricks and chewing gum. Now replacing Legos with banana cartons, Schnyder used the container of an everyday-object rather than the contents. By placing his pixel paintings—themselves receptacles for a minimal color-information—in boxes, Schnyder emphasizes the meaning of containers and containment.

As if attempting to place his entire work in a figurative nutshell, the aforementioned *kleine Bilder* (*small pictures*) are ordered alphabetically from A to Z, from beginning to end; containing everything that constitutes his oeuvre in

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a reduced, pixelated iteration. An additional 27th group titled *kleine Bilder (Anhang A-Z)* completes the alphabetical system and simultaneously reduces it *ad absurdum*. The paint used for this also 6-part work was taken from the leftovers of the 26 *kleine Bilder [small pictures]* works individually named for the alphabet. Thus, the material of *kleine Bilder (Anhang A-Z)* contains in a literal way all of the other groups and constitutes their beginning and end. These canvases are the only ones not painted in the pixelated grid system and their expressive colors, applied with a scraper, at once irritate and overcome the system.

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder was born in 1945 in Basel, CH. He lives and works in Zug, CH. His first solo exhibition organized by Eva Presenhuber at Galerie Walcheturm in Zurich took place in 1993, another one in 1996. A solo exhibition at Galerie Hauser & Wirth & Presenhuber took place in 1999. At Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zurich, Schnyder has had solo exhibitions in 2004 and 2010. In 2018, Eva Presenhuber, New York showed the body of works *Am Thuner See* in a solo exhibition. Schnyder contributed to exhibitions such as the 55th Biennale di Venezia, Venice, IT, 2013; the Biennale de Paris, Paris, FR, 1985 and 1971; Documenta 5, Kassel, GER, 1972; and Documenta 7, Kassel, GER, 1982. Recent solo exhibitions have taken place in international institutions including Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH, 2014; Kunstmuseum Bern, Bern, CH, 2013; Ca' Corner della Regina Venice, Venice, IT, 2013; Le Consortium, Dijon, FR, 2012; The Swiss Institute/Contemporary Art, New York, USA, 2011. Group exhibitions in major museums include Zeitgeist: MAMCO – musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Geneva, CH (2017), Das Fotobuch und seine Autoren: Swiss National Library, Bern, CH (2015), Drawings from the Ringier Collection Chapter I: Villa Flora Winterthur – Sammlung Hahnloser, Winterthur, CH (2015), Ferdinand Hodler, Jean-Frédéric Schnyder: Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich, CH (2014).

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