High & Low

Already since the historic beginnings of the development of modern large urban centers, the arts have reacted to the look and feel of city life as well as its impertinences. From the allure that the light of gas lanterns held for the impressionists to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's view on Potsdamer Platz, artists have always sought to use artistic means to capture with the most immediacy possible the pulsing life, the abundance of simultaneities, the hectic pace and the sense of alienation within city life. The modern globalized city, too, constricted as it is by the increasing privatization of public space and eaten away by advertisements and commerce, still offers plenty of working space for artistic examination, analysis and exploration. In the second half of the 20th century, a form of direct artistic expression emerged that followed the extreme developments of the city – a form of expression that not only focused upon the city but also played itself out within the spaces of the city. Now, looking back on nearly four decades of street art history, during which time a countless number of its former forms of protest, their spirit broken, have been tailored for marketing purposes, one might think that its reservoir of ideas has long since run dry; and phenomena like the current hype surrounding dealt graffiti art is nothing less than the key proof needed to confirm such an opinion.

On closer look, however, it is possible to counter that opinion by pointing out that with the popularization of the ideas inherent within street art, it has seeped into the collective consciousness, encountering the potential to combine and meld with other forces in fruitful or even explosive ways.

In historical terms, Hannes Broecker is among the second-generation sons of this street-born genre of art. Already influenced by his cultural experiences with the lifestyle and aesthetic of hip-hop and graffiti, he studied "interdisciplinary and experimental art" at the Art Academy of Dresden between 2003 and 2008. His interest in art did not come from a sympathetic art teacher's inkling of his talent, his examination of the art volumes on his parents' bookshelves or an evening school drawing course. Far more, his visual foundations emerged within the context of the media culture of the 1990s, in an extreme sub-cultural scene marked by its visual codes, a culture that counted among its ranks the "old masters" of the 1970s New York old-school spray-

ers as well as the artists with roots in graffiti who died young, like Jean Michel Basquiat and, perhaps, Keith Haring. For this artistic generation, judging based on the motto of documenta 12, the classical modern does not seem to be “our antique” but, at best, past history. In a true postmodern inversion of cause and effect, the traditional broke its way into the modern for Hannes Broecker during his period of art studies.

The result of the consequential imputed mix of influences from high and low, old and new, polished and raw, conformist and subversive is mirrored within his current artistic works in an intensely colorful, formally heterogeneous way rich in visual fissures.

Tilted black-yellow trusses of barrier tape and warning marks, fragments of typographies such as the script used for “POLIZEI” (“POLICE”), free-handed and quickly painted tatters of letters atop lines set in an exacting constructive manner, tables, jagged points, arrows and rhomboid shapes all appear in his primarily large-format canvas paintings. He reshapes traces of tags and stencils with expressive brushstrokes, short blocks of color thrown on with pastose, thin-glazed and sprayed surfaces, clouds, gradations, crosshatching, and lines scratched into wet colors.

Hannes Broeckers works completely contradict the classical presentation of exhibitions and appear to be marching like a moving barricade toward the beholder with a fury all their own. Their common motif is order and chaos – a superimposed, converging set of immediacies effecting a randomly parenthetical feeling. Denials, blockades and integrated verbal “anti-” statements all cite the rebellious gestures of street art and transmit an echo of the heartbeat of graffiti and hip-hop. Binding together constructive pictorial elements that appear ordered and artistically fleshed-out color spaces and fields, Hannes Broecker works against conformity – yet with a seeming awareness that non-conformity quickly shifts into attitude. He places the openness of nonrepresentational color spaces and intuitive compositions next to the standard gestures and samples of subculture chic that long ago fell victim to the mainstream appetite for originality. On their part, these seem like insouciant formal citations from abstract and nonrepresentational art, thus opening a field of possible associations that is just as rich, stretching from Imi Knoebel all the way to action painting. In his works, the flashing “blitz” of past spray can revolts and strong gestures such as those

from the neo-expressive works of the early 1980s encounter each other – simultaneously interrupted and held together by strictly constructed grids and frames with a strong industrial feel.

Seen within the context of contemporary art, the works of Hannes Broecker express the negation of all attempts to develop individual handwriting. Instead, he seeks to state his visual values using varying combinations of already extant codes that, while individual and unique in and of themselves, are actually representational expressions of particular, recognizable cultural contexts. Broecker's visual emphasis focuses on the direct immediacy of the city and its culture, yet his view of the city contains no sense of being lost or of staking out individuality within the masses; for him, just as for everything with art-historical origins, urban symbols and codes are the springboard for open aesthetic speculation.

Hannes Broecker uses alternate means to capture the essence of his artistry within his sculptures and object installations; most of his three-dimensional works are at least partially painted. He uses materials like mattresses and tension belts, concrete, timber, cardboard and tar. As with his paintings, his sculptures also contain variations on the basic motif of the barricade. Seen from within the system of conventionally presented art exhibitions, the sculptures, more so than the pictures, appear to be a balancing act between aggression and seduction; they hide entrances, denying the viewer a view and compensating for it with the beckoningly vivid strength of stark colors as well as with unusual surfaces and materials such as painted mattresses, tarred lumber and concrete-encased bubble wrap.

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