

On “Thing Without Title” or a foreword

By Maria Messmer

In a time flooded by images, in a society “that needs quick and efficient hypnotic suggestion by means of words and images” (Panajotis Kondylis), people who tread paths that are contrary to the establishment norms are rare, but they exist.

Such a person is Michael Schneider, whose contrariness is reflected in the technique he has chosen, i.e. the demanding technique of woodcutting, which is one of the oldest methods of giving images form.

He produces huge monochrome hand-printed woodcuts in a strictly limited edition of three copies: this is his rejection of mass production. He consciously defends himself against bright colors and media art, which in the words of the artist “only lead to the loss of true meaning”. His works do not follow a particular trend neither in subject matter nor form. The “pleasure” he takes in woodcutting is his point of departure, a fact which, among other things, finds its visual expression in the size of his pictures.

Michael Schneider’s art is absolute. Abstract. He combines the cult-like and the archetypal with his stringently subjective imagination and his very personal view of the world. The print becomes a “thing without title - detached from its origins”, providing symbolic contact with the archaic. It is only one part of the whole, since the block and the print cannot be separated. What is represented becomes a relic with sacral features (Triptych “In that act of worship, however, the relationship to a thing is essential”, 1991).

The frames he uses time and again inspired by the “one-copy woodcuts” with religious themes popular after 1400. It is the function of these frames to create space. They enclose the image and open up to it, they reinforce its message. The artist’s breach with the traditional technique of woodcutting and his use of unusual material for his blocks suggest experimentation. “The better I became at the technique, the more dissatisfied I was with the results.”

Recently Schneider has started using slate instead of knives. Working on the printing block - made of any piece of wood - thus becomes more spontaneous. He beats the blocks “rhythmically with the stone” and therefore can base his work on a very rough sketch only. Time manifests itself in the traces the stone leaves - sometimes inadvertently - and in the stone itself, which crumbles during the process.

The “primordial elements” he finds include the grain and are concealed behind block-like forms. However, the rough massiveness is juxtaposed with delicate details. They interweave and penetrate each other and combine to form something new. A perceptible aura has been subtly created, which sends out coded messages from the printing block and the print. The artist’s hope “that the viewer will perceive the form on a unconscious level” (that the act of perceiving becomes the real object) is inherent in the process. Such viewing requires asceticism and contemplation.

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