

MK Kaehne – Mutter

22. April – 3. Juni 2023

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In Zusammenarbeit mit Anemone Vostell, BAM! Berlin Art Management

What an exhibition title!

It rattles around in everyone's head. Thousandfold associations open up. For everyone! What drives the artist MK Kaehne to name his exhibition in such a way? The German term *mother* is universal and is understood in almost every language - if the Latin written form exists in it.

Although recently a few days ago in a report of the German Public TV ARD the word *mother* was replaced with the terms *delivering* and *birthing person*, but after a shit storm again changed to *mother*. The word *mother* is highly emotionally charged. Who is surprised?

The main work of the exhibition, right in the main room of the gallery, the sculpture of a lifelike naked woman in her prime sitting on a bed, looking at her crotch with a mirror, causes irritation. Especially in the context of the exhibition title and the name of the cycle of works *Mother*.

Is she representative of the female human race, which is present to all of us at least as mother, but could also be the sister, the lover or the daughter? Is this verism simply a portrait or an homage? The artist leaves the answer to this open.

Today, after the me-too debate has caused many a storm, can an artist, especially a man, recreate a naked woman lifelike - in addition, as a life-size sculpture and looking at her sex herself - hyperrealistically? Is he allowed to do that? These questions now arise automatically. And is a naked woman allowed to be depicted so explicitly at all?

The last question in particular seems grotesque, given that the entire history of art bears witness to the nudity of women as a subject for painting and sculpture. But times have changed: The religious right of all stripes dictate in many places - even in democratic countries - the political correctness of social and also artistic behavior. But also the necessary debate - with please appropriate implementations! - regarding the equality of women and men has led to the irritated climate around the nudity of women. It can sometimes take strange and evangelical forms. Read politically-socially, 'it is allowed' when discrimination as a mere sexual object is out of the question. And that is the case here!

The untitled naked female figure as a work of art provokes all kinds of questions. And it is meant to do so. In the context of the exhibition title and the series of works *Mother*, an invitation is extended to go along with the mental contextualization.

The depicted woman in her prime contemplates her own sex, examines it. Similar to Paris, who recognizes himself in the water mirror image, this woman becomes aware of herself. Her gender stands for her desire but also for the agony of the birth experience. The female sex stands for our own origins - we have all been pressed out of this 'gate of life' in real terms, sometimes with help. The vulva also reflects, as it were, the pleasurable aspects of female life, but in a figurative sense also those for a majority of men.

The woman in bed meets us at eye level, even if she inspects her crotch, i.e. the gaze is directed downwards. The bed becomes a pedestal and the voyeur in us does not have it easy. The woman sculpture confronts us through herself, does not become an object, is our counterpart.

The neon sign (LED) with the word MOTHER written soberly in capitals accompanies the sculpture and opens up a wide variety of associative spaces. At the latest by this wall work the freedom frame for the existence of this sculpture is opened. They condition each other - at least in this staging, but could theoretically also be independent of each other (see above). The term mother has become universal and, in MK Kaehne's representation, a logo that could hang above the main entrance of a company's headquarters, and thus part of his artistic strategy of thinking through the capitalization of terms as well.

The addition of further artworks in the work cycle *Mother* such as plate or handbag leads in the MK Kaehne typical sober, but value-increasing, because of the department store world formally borrowed staging argumentation aids for the fact that the female naked figure could actually be universally meant as the mother. The wall plate as a symbol of (maternal, at least parental) stuffiness - here broken down to a typographically reduced, grotesque motto - could illustrate this. The handbag, however, stands per se for the female sex, - can therefore be assigned to the mother, but also to the girlfriend, wife, daughter or mistress. (Even if the fashion world since the 90s has discovered the man as a handbag carrier - and he himself at times - and for the purpose of building new markets likes to develop further). But the owner of the handbag is defensible. The baseball bat, which is integrated into this suitcase ensemble, indicates this in its surprising presence.

The hyperrealistic bust sculpture of a boy, called *Portrait (My mother was...)*, also belongs to the series of works *Mother*. Here again it could be associated that the female sculpture located in the first room is possibly to be read as a mother.

But this is not clear.

Thus MK Kaehne leaves us alone with the question that automatically arises at the beginning and gladly leaves us the space for our own projections. Assigned to the cycle *Mother* is also the sumptuously staged, shapely foam beater, the work is titled *Destroy*. (Unfortunately not shown here in the exhibition due to lack of space). An attribute that can be assigned to the household, that refuge that has been defined, negotiated, or also questioned as the domain of women in the most diverse socio-political contexts since the modern era. The so-called Frankfurt kitchen as a liberation of the woman from slavish service in an environment that now functionally facilitates labor comes to mind, but at the same time continues to stipulate her social position. The title *Destroy* refers to the ambivalence, even to her opposition!

But also the beauty of the object, here especially the beauty of form is negotiated with this work. MK Kaehne's biography (born in Moscow, raised there and in Berlin) led him to the artistic examination of Russian Constructivism, which early on pursued the vision (similar to the Bauhaus) of serving the Russian people with its art. The artistic visionary, because politics led to totality, was quickly defined as formalism and the protagonists, if they continued, were persecuted. The then utopian staging of the temples of goods - and kiosks (sic!) have deeply impressed the artist, and led him to the staging of his, one could call them functional sculptures.

With his hyperrealistic figures Kaehne leads the attention away from the commodity, the image, to the consumers, the recipients.

Nevertheless, the bust of the boy also breathes this spirit of the staging of goods. Positioned on a precious pedestal with a Plexiglas hood, once again elevated by a sued-covered pedestal like a show jewel, the T-shirt covering the boy is elaborately embroidered with a saying, similar to a logo on a pop T-shirt: *My mother was a friend of an enemy of the people*. The artist borrowed this slogan from a song by the punk group *Blurt*, suggesting among other things that punk has long since arrived in the mainstream.

MK Kaehne's double strategy on the one hand of a staging that takes the department store aesthetic to the extreme (the sculpture of the naked woman on the bed is also placed on such a precious pedestal!), is countered by the titling of the work, or the slogans readable in the work by printing and burning (porcelain) or embroidery.

The space for diverse associations is open and we as viewers must decide for ourselves how we want to see and understand the art of MK Kaehne. So who is the untitled sculpture of the naked woman? *Mother*?

Semjon H. N. Semjon,
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