

## **kraftWORK by Thomas Prochnow**

December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 – January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016

Thomas Prochnow's second solo-appearance in the gallery Semjon Contemporary – with a related photograph and an installation-like painting-sculpture, recently displayed at the gallery's *Garten-Salon* – is very minimalistic, but all the more powerful: presented are only two framed, large-scale photographs and a video on the entrance wall.

These two large-scale works measuring 150 x 220 cm bear witness to and are the result of an artistic intervention performed just recently on the premises of the disused Power Station Mitte in the Köpenicker Straße in Berlin, better known as *Kraftwerk* housing the techno club *Tresor*. One of the two pictorial motifs was taken directly in the *Tresor* room, where Thomas Prochnow, following an invitation by *Tresor* boss Dimitri Hegemann, had sprayed a white circular geometric sign onto the wall. The other picture testifies to a place located below the power station not accessible to the public.

For the second time in his life, the artist is directly invited to spray his artistic sign on a wall in a semi-public space, as he did four months ago on behalf of the UNESCO World Heritage Site in Shaft XII of the Zollverein (coal mine) in Essen, in preparation of and accompanying his large exhibition *Der Zweite Öffentliche Raum* (Second Public Space) in the former coal washing plant (currently with a portal on industrial culture) scheduled to run until the end of January 2016.

This is a new experience for the artist, as he usually uses to visit abandoned or unused buildings or anonymous transportation architecture, in order to realize his artistic interventions, which are, by the way, rarely the results of a spontaneous impulse, but rather carefully conceived projects planned on the computer, once the scouting phase with situational photographs is finished. With minimal interventions he has been working on thoroughly extracting the essential aspects of the captured space by the confrontational placement of a perfectly contoured sign that would contrast with the ruined, worn place. With this intervention – playing with the opposition of perfection contrasting a loss of contours through decay – Thomas Prochnow puts his finger on the weak spot of this place and its predestined decline.

As with the *Kraftwerk*, but also with the UNESCO World Heritage Site Zollverein Essen, these places are actually abandoned spaces, deprived of their original purpose. However, new life was breathed into them without destroying the charm of their beauty, a result of our longing for such a thing as industrial romanticism.

Prochnow regards himself as sculptor, painter and also photographer. His scanning of spaces, inhaling their essence, leaving his sign of intervention in these places, are aspects that combine to recommend him as a sculptor, who already envisions the result (a sculpture, spatial alignment, section of space) as a staged photograph before his inner eye, after having created (or rather sprayed) the image-generating sign with painterly means. The photograph will survive, the pictorial intervention, presumably, will not.

The two presented large-scale photographs provide a direct look into his creative work, through their size almost generating a real encounter, and let us dive into Prochnow's

redefined *Second Public Space/Zweiten Öffentlichen Raum* controlled by him.

The artist calls his exhibition at Semjon Contemporary *kraftWORK*. On the one hand, this designation relates to a creative site, a number of works created and to be created there in the future, and on the other, it is a metaphor and paraphrase of his ambition to condense his artistic intervention to a minimal sign, and to unite the essence of a place and his creative activity in a mental and physical effort, by the way paying tribute to his favourite band *Kraftwerk*.

In other exhibition contexts Prochnow has repeatedly demonstrated that he is a master of space. With various exhibitions at non-profit venues and in spring 2015 at the Kunstverein Gera the artist has confidently proven his capability of extracting and distilling the essence of a room and visualizing it by means of his installational interventions. The blocking of the main exhibition room in Gera, originally equipped with bay windows and bull's eye panes, by a massive monochrome blue wall which suggestively and visually cut another wall, has shocked the visitors accustomed to their Kunstverein, challenging them at the same time to readjust their perception of this room exactly on the basis of its absence.

Thomas Prochnow's development from street artist to a visual artist can be traced in his work: with his East German post-reunification background – born in Gera/ Thuringia in 1978 and grown up there – Thomas Prochnow has started early, already at the age of ten, to develop his own visual signs and test them on the architecture of his hometown instead of the usual tags sufficiently known to us. With their reduced geometric forms his signs are related to the constructivist movement in Classical Modernism. A black square on a crumbling wall, celebrating the wedding of Classical Modernism and street art, is definitely something special, courageous and very unconventional. Soon had he realized that the practice of documenting his own work, or rather trophy gathering, common in these circles would eventually lead him to another artistic medium, namely that of photography, but that the same oeuvre would reach top-quality, is new in this genre and requires a second glance, which – and of this I am convinced – he and his work shall withstand and which invites us to further explore Prochnow's art.

The video which accompanies the exhibition allows us to look behind the scenes and follow the, partly subversive, creative act.

Semjon H. N. Semjon, December 2015