

FLEISCHESLUST (CARNAL DESIRE): George Grosz in dialogue with Rainer Fetting, Sven Marquardt, Xenia Hausner, Jörn Grothkopp

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In its new exhibition FLEISCHESLUST (Carnal Desire) the Galerie Deschler is presenting about twenty works by George Grosz in dialogue with nudes and portraits by Rainer Fetting, Sven Marquardt, Xenia Hausner and Jörn Grothkopp. The works by Grosz were created in the United States between 1937 and 1940 and are all nudes, including scenes of the painter with his model, nudes in various poses, dressing and undressing, as well as in sexual interactions. They are juxtaposed with contemporary works by the other artists, mostly, but not exclusively, nudes.

As the title already indicates, the focus of the nudes is on the element of sensual pleasure, be it the voyeuristic pleasure of beholding a nude body or the representation of sexual lust. The pleasure, however, is not restricted to that of the viewer but can also include the pleasure the model derives from his or her own body. While Grosz' works depict exclusively female nudes, Fetting and Marquardt also include male nudes. Juxtaposing the nudes of these artists shows the development—as well as the range of possibilities—in which the element of erotic lust can take on a decidedly political and critical dimension.

The works of this series of nudes by **George Grosz** are noticeably different from the overtly critical and satirical approach of his better-known works from his earlier German period in the context of Dada and New Objectivity. While in the earlier works Grosz instrumentalized the female nude, notably in the depiction of prostitutes, as an indictment of the moral decay of late capitalism in the Weimar Republic, and eroticism appeared in its fully subversive power, the focus of these later works has shifted to artistic, rather than political, expression. This was certainly to a good extent due to his changed personal circumstances in the United States. Using his wife Eva as well as her sister Lotte as models, the voyeuristic pleasure granted by the sight of their bodies is emphasized by their luscious and oftentimes exaggerated corpulence. In his autobiography Grosz describes in detail an experience of viewing a 38-year old woman undressing when he was fourteen: this was possibly a major inspiration for the numerous partly un-dressed nudes in his oeuvre. Though similar in style, his depiction of the female nude had shifted from a tool of biting satire to a source of refreshingly unabashed sensual pleasure, the voluptuousness of the body no longer decried, but celebrated without false embarrassment.

In the oeuvre of **Rainer Fetting** this celebration of the sensuality of the body is continued, but does not remain restricted to the female nude. The depiction of the body furthermore reacquires a political dimension, but this time precisely in its erotic pleasure. Rather than serving as a cipher for licentiousness and decay like in Grosz' early work, or as erotic-voyeuristic if artistically sublimated lust in Grosz' later work, the freedom of self-determined sexual pleasure is claimed as a political right. This is most apparent in Fetting's early male nudes, which have to be seen in context with his own sexuality and his involvement in the Berlin gay rights movement.

In the photographs of **Sven Marquardt** erotic pleasure takes on yet another form. In his portraits of both men and women, the models enact and are in control of their own staging. No longer mere objects of desire in the eye of the beholder or the artist, his subjects confidently flaunt their own sexuality. But here, too, the pleasure they derive from their overtly sexual bodies has blatant political implications. Marquardt developed his distinct artistic style during the 1980s when he photographed the sub-cultures of East Berlin, notably those where sexuality was very consciously acted out in its subversive power, as a force beyond streamlining and control, which was therefore not without reason regarded with deep suspicion by the East German authorities.

In the paintings by **Jörn Grothkopp** we encounter quite a different take on the topic of erotic pleasure. In the extreme fading of colors and the smoothing of shapes the luridly attractive poses of the young women depicted are transformed into ciphers of desire that mysteriously evade the grasp of the beholder. Instead of striking individuals who derive their provocative, in-your-face sensuality from their imperfections and concrete materiality as in Marquardt's photographs, Grothkopp's works presents us with figures that seem more like apparitions. Their generically abstract quality transforms them into projection screens for the desire of the beholder, a desire that by its very nature must remain unfulfilled, for it lingers in the realm of the ideal or virtual.

These four male perspectives on the body, the nude and the pleasure it holds is countered by a female one in the works of **Xenia Hausner**. Unlike in their works, the presentation of the body as object of desire, be it for the beholder of the work or a beholder included in the image, does not take center stage. The figure, rather, is embedded into a narrative context that is seems at the same time key for the meaning of the image and remains unknown. In a painting like „Certain Women“ the figures of the four women, all seen but in fragments, are set into a physical relationship to each other, but—and this is striking—have no eye contact whatsoever. The circumstances of their exact relationship remain mysterious, and it is just this openness of the narrative that make these images so compelling.