

responding to noises we cannot hear. This is not simply an alien landscape, but rather a landscape in which we find we are the aliens, and the camera's gaze is characterized not by mastery but by bewilderment and confusion.

—Adam Jasper

VIENNA

Michael Kienzer

GALERIE ELISABETH & KLAUS THOMAN

Poised between lightness and presence, between impromptu conception and deliberate creative choice, between the construction of sculpture in the moment and its perpetual disintegration, Michael Kienzer's practice typically performs a balancing act. In his exhibition "*grau und farbig*" (gray and colorful), the Vienna-based artist gave another bravura demonstration of his mastery of sculptural precision.

Entering the gallery, the visitor was welcomed by a fourteen-foot-tall wall object bearing the programmatic title *Weiß auf Weiß* (*Zeichnung Vol 6*) (White on White [Drawing Vol. 6]) (all works cited, 2018). The title succinctly captured what set this piece apart in an exhibition that showed Kienzer grappling with questions of color to an extent not seen in his earlier work, while suggesting that white on white is also a prerequisite for any sustained engagement with color. It was composed of bent, folded, and seemingly knotted lengths of zinc sheeting given a coat of white paint and mounted on a whitewashed wall. The metal simulated an enormous strip of crumpled paper, with formlessness its only principle of form. *Weiß auf Weiß*, one might say, marked the blank slate on which the exhibition unfolded.

White gave way to gray: *Schacht horizontal* (Horizontal Vent), a stepped series of platforms made of cinder blocks and sections of galvanized steel grating, was installed in the middle of the room as a kind of sculptural staircase leading nowhere. The steel grating is a widely available and hard-wearing construction material, used, for example, in heavy-duty floor grilles on sidewalks. Permeable to light and air, its surface animated by soft highlights, it contrasted with the dull gray of the cinder blocks that supported it. Compared to

this robust arrangement, the wall object *Graues Verhältnis* (Gray Relationship) played with subtler nuances. It combined twisted metal sheets with layers of a softer steel mesh that produced patterns, seemingly suspending the piece between sculptural definition and the dissolution of form.

The interaction between materials is key to Kienzer's art; in this show, it was highlighted in particular by the central installation, *Flyer Vol 3* (*Gesamtinstallation*) (Flyer Vol. 3 [Total Installation]). The visitor strolled between sculptures consisting of two, three, or four bent and buckled metal panels that brought to mind those in *Weiß auf Weiß*. With light and shadow throwing their warps into relief, they once again brought paper to mind; the assemblages, held together only by rods and magnets,

might have been outsize flyers, brochures, or invitation cards. Each of the constituent parts had a title naming its colors and the number of elements, drawing attention to certain aspects of what was there to see: pure color, color in concert with other colors, color in relation to form, color in relation to material, color in relation to the exhibition space—for the patient beholder, an entire theory of color spread out across the room.

The show was thus further evidence of the outstanding skill with which Kienzer strikes a delicate balance in the process of giving form to material and color. Marrying the artist's playful ease with pinpoint accuracy, these sculptures also revealed his sense of humor, perhaps most of all in those instances where he put materials familiar from everyday life to thoroughly unconventional uses.

—Franz Thalmer

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

MILAN

Walter Swennen

LA TRIENNALE DI MILANO

Given his loosely painted figuration and freewheeling combinations of words with overlapping Pop imagery, Walter Swennen could easily be mistaken for a neo-expressionist. However, the thirty-six works in this small survey of the Brussels-based septuagenarian artist's production underlined his continuing exploration of how to put a painting together. Along with canvases from the past four decades, it included one sculpture, a painted metal disk, and two large rolls of painted paper.

Swennen studied psychology, wrote poetry, and taught psychoanalysis before seriously picking up a paintbrush in 1980. He describes the problematics of painting as lying "not between image and word, but between image and word on the one hand and painting on the other." One could also say that his work inhabits the space between picture and object. In any case, writing plays as essential a part in his visual language as images do. As a poet he was interested in concrete poetry and calligrams, and this attraction to word/image crossovers is carried into his paintings.

For instance, *MOOR* was painted diagonally downward in *Untitled (Room)*, 2011, but with an arrow pointing upward, suggesting the correct, though unconventional, direction of reading.

Several works were patterned with letters directing the eye around the canvas, leading the mind to find words or to make them up. Others seemed to offer arbitrary associations between words and pictures. Two early works, *Untitled (Spook, Mist)* and *Alphabetum*, both 1981, provided insights into Swennen's development and thinking process. Each was painted on a single unrolled sheet of paper and pinned to the wall. They contain loosely rendered images in oil and lacquer next to single words; in the former, *MIST* is written next to a windmill, while in the latter a funnel sits by the word *RABBIT*. In the decades since, Swennen has added

Michael Kienzer, *Weiß auf Weiß* (*Zeichnung Vol 6*) (White on White [Drawing Vol. 6]), 2018, zinc sheet, lacquer, 14' × 10' × 1' 7¼".

