

WALTER STÖHRER – FORCE FIELDS

Duration: 16.09. – 05.12.2010

Press Conference: 15.09.2010, 11.00 am

Opening: Wednesday, 15.09.2010, 8.00 pm

Curator: Eva Müller-Remmert

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Having earned the reputation of a rebellious maverick, Walter Stöhrer (1937-2000) was a chief exponent of gestural, figurative painting, and wielded an enduring influence on Germany's domestic art scene. In the year of the European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010, which also coincides with the 10th anniversary of the artist's death, the MKM is now honouring the artist with the first comprehensive retrospective to be staged in the Ruhr region. Beginning with his early works from the 1960s, the exhibition showcases Stöhrer's key creative phases, down to the last painting, across an area measuring some 1000 sq.m.

On view in the MKM are some 70 paintings, over-paintings on paper, sketches and ink drawings. The oldest canvas dates back to 1960/62, the most recent is from 1999 - which proved to be the last picture he completed before his death. Visitors are invited to embark on a tour through four decades of unceasing artistic activity, with the loose chronology affording space for exciting combinations of works. The paintings are augmented by a documentation of Stöhrer's sketches, correspondence and artist's booklets, which grant a fascinating insight into his creative modus operandi.

Walter Stöhrer's oeuvre is quite unique. Along with his student colleague Horst Antes and his teacher HAP Grieshaber, he was a key protagonist of the new Karlsruhe Figuration movement and rendered a major contribution to shaping German art history. Characteristic features of his work are the intensive colours, and the unrestrained interplay between painting, writing and drawing and his figurative and gestural means of expression. "The decisive quality was his incredible verve and his burning desire to articulate himself. Sometimes his painting was a genuinely barbaric act", explains Günther Wirth, who as friend, curator and art critic accompanied Stöhrer and his work over many decades (see Catalogue for full interview).

Literature has always featured strongly in Stöhrer's output. His canvasses and the titles of his paintings frequently contain literary quotes and fragments of poems. Yet writing was deployed

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not merely as a compositional element; for it was the associative encounter with literature which formed the genesis of his paintings.

Although the main focus of the MKM exhibition is directed at Stöhrer's paintings, important etchings, ink drawings and over-paintings on paper are also on show, as is the 14-part cycle "Horror trip", taken from his extensive body of prints. A central space in the exhibition has also been devoted to showcasing the monumental four-part work "Slaughter the Father" ("Schlachtet den Vater") from 1969. In a five-hour long public painting performance at the Württembergischer Kunstverein in Stuttgart, a regional cultural centre, Walter Stöhrer overpainted four large-scale drawings (each 220 x 630 cm.) by his professor HAP Grieshaber, who had expressly invited his best student to do this. Particularly against the backdrop of the contemporaneous radicalism of Joseph Beuys, the result furnishes vivid testimony to the confrontation with teachers, tradition and role models, which also testifies to Stöhrer's creativity and power of expression.

"Walter Stöhrer's paintings", comments Eva Müller-Remmert, the curator of the exhibition, "are dynamic force fields of internal action and reaction, relationships and tensions. They symbolise the growth and decay, the perpetual transformation of our existence." Of great interest is also the connection with our museum's collection. By acquiring two gouaches by Walter Stöhrer in the 1980s, Sylvia and Ulrich Ströher laid the foundations for their collection, which is housed today in the MKM.

We are delighted that the Prime Minister of the State of Schleswig-Holstein, Peter Harry Carstensen, will be opening the exhibition in the MKM on September 15, at 8 pm. Walter Stöhrer established his last major atelier in the town of Scholderup in Schleswig-Holstein. Following his appointment to the post of Professor for Painting at the Berlin Academy of the Arts in 1986, he would spend the summer months living and working there, and it was there that he died in the spring of 2000. Today, the Walter Stöhrer Foundation, with which we worked closely in staging this exhibition, is domiciled in Scholderup.

The Stiftung für Kunst und Kultur e.V. Bonn is responsible for the organisation of the exhibition. A catalogue accompanying the exhibition is published by Brinkmann & Bose and features contributions by Eva Müller-Remmert, Claudia Posca, Karsten Müller and a discussion between Walter Smerling and Günther Wirth.

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