



Hendrik Krawen

Opening: January 19, 2005, 7 p.m.

Duration of exhibition: January 20 - 26, 2005

Press release

Hendrik Krawen

On the Street Edge or "Living in the Garden of Life"

The principle of the "depletion of motifs" also rules in Hendrik Krawen's more recent works. By this he asserts what remains an ingeniously formless, monochromatic surface; its processing stands in the tradition of the New York School's lyrical abstraction (cf. Michael Krajewski's "raum für raum" (room for room) at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, forthcoming.) The association of his approach to painting with the New York School adds a strong new facet to Krawen's oeuvre.

Krawen continues to sporadically place his pictorial objects that he has painted with great precision and love of on the lower edge of the painting. This enables him to achieve a depth of perspective and/or an extremely wide horizon, which creates the void that lends his pictures such a strange sense of melancholy. The "sick colors" used by him underscore the impression of an almost unreal atmosphere.

The repertory of motifs has, however, undergone a noticeable change over the past year. Up until then, Krawen had primarily made recourse to architectural fragments taken from the urban habitat surrounding him. Demolition ruins or other constellations that are interesting from an urban perspective were linked with recurring motifs such as record covers or lamps that seemed to be taken from the artist's personal belongings. Yet in the newer paintings he reduces the architectural repertory to the greatest possible extent so that he can focus on a certain type of street lamp (found in the eastern part of Germany.) In a certain way they structure the wild mix on the bottom edges of his paintings; lately the artist has added towering cardboard boxes of very different origin to create an urban arrangement of sorts. It can be described as urban since like in an architectural model Krawen positions the figures between the boxes or arranges the former around the latter so that at first glance these boxes resemble modernist urban landscapes in these given constellations filled with people and street lamps.

The cardboard boxes with the different labels in different, sometimes foreign languages should only be mentioned in passing. Typography has always been something that has interested Krawen. They recall Care packages that could be tossed down from the air. As metropolitan clutter they are now destined to rot in stacks. In Krawen's paintings they also become emblematic of global co-existence – as receptacles for consumer products and cargo/mail-order goods of various types and origins. Where all of this actually comes together ultimately becomes irrelevant in Krawen's architectural representation. Thus in these new paintings the artist is able to shrewdly evade the question often posed to him as to the references to places. Living in Berlin where he settled in 2001 (after Düsseldorf) – a city that merge architectural decline and a major building boom – questions regarding the motifs of his paintings must have really gotten on his nerves. It is thus understandable that he began working with cardboard – a material that was in a sense without a place or an owner. In this way Krawen has ingeniously gotten around being stigmatised as a "Düsseldorf" or "Berlin" painter.

In these new works Krawen refrains from incorporating new pictorial information that refers to urban situation in his immediate surroundings or to a specific architectural phenomenon. At the same time, however, he signals by the use of a new technique of painting that the things that he finds in reality still represent a concrete frame of reference for his pictures. They are not imaginary or even surrealist constellations. Recently, some of his paintings (in different shades of gray) have come to resemble negatives. In other paintings, the pictorial objects and figures could be likened with silhouettes. We encounter them in green and red on white and black monochromatic ground. Even here he is able to achieve a pictorial effect that evokes a negative. Here photography can be seen a medium that seems to objectify a pictorial reality while at on the other hand it serves as a concrete model for Krawen, reinforcing his recent paintings. Thanks to his precise style of painting Krawen once again appears from behind the paintings as an individual who studies things and the way they are designed and structured very closely

Maren Lübcke-Tidow

For more detailed information on the exhibition please contact the Engholm Engelhorn Galerie unter +43 1 585 73 37.