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Heiner Wemhöner: ABOUT PAINTING.



Heiner Wemhöner is one of my favorite art collectors, due to the warmth, emotion, and honesty he brings to collecting, not to mention his cutting eye for really great and interesting contemporary art. I first visited him in his home city of **Herford, Germany**, located outside of Hannover in 2013, where he showed me a considerable amount of artwork and we spoke of the series of books he had published about his collection, the third of which, focused on sculpture, had been recently released at that time. I was really blown away by how massive his holding of contemporary art was, not to mention the modesty by which he breached the topic of how he had accumulated such a formidable international collection, which he has very personally hand-picked throughout the world over the past few decades.

20. April 2016 marks the release of the much-anticipated edition of his series of catalogues— this time focusing on the paintings of the collection. I leaped at the chance to sit down with him again, this time in Berlin, to see what the world should expect from the latest endeavor of **„Sammlung Wemhöner“**.

Anzeige





Liu Wei, Jungle No. 21, 2013, Canvas and Wood, 209.5 x 209.5 cm (Courtesy of White Cube, London + Hong Kong)

ABOUT PAINTING focuses on the painting in your collection and it's the fifth book in the series of catalogues you have done. I'm pretty excited to see it. What was the process like in creating this catalogue?

It was a big challenge to do it because everything originally started with paintings and I thought and a lot of people thought that paintings would not be important for the collection. Now, I'm very surprised to see how important the paintings are. We also changed a little bit the book in general so we put positions together— meaning artists, which you don't expect to be shown together. And this is quite exciting. And therefore we also decided to show this, not all the paintings from the collection but rather a selection just before the gallery weekend because I think a book is a book, and a book cannot replace the original artwork; therefore, I am very happy that we found a good location to show it and to show it to everybody who is interested in seeing it.



Peter Stauss, Game (Morale and Reality), 2012, Oil on Carton, 200 x 216 cm (Courtesy of carlier gebauer Berlin)

I like Galerie Judin as a location for this a lot because I think the space in which the gallery is located will somehow enhance the leitmotif of the paintings of your collection, which for somehow bears a different hue than the average collection. If you were to do the show again at Max Hetzler, like last time, it would feel different, too, because even the type of painting Mr. Hetzler shows is different.

Yes, of course, but unfortunately those rooms are now used for other purposes. To my knowledge, I think they are used as office space now. I think it is always good to also change the space—not to always do it in the same space. I think it's nice to show the collection in different locations. We should have done it earlier, but sometimes it's more exciting when it comes unexpected. I think at this moment, nobody thinks about the collection anymore, the time goes fast and even faster, and then you come and 'boop' you are there again.



Guillaume Bruère, untitled, 12.03.2012, Color as Saviour of Humanity, 2012, Acrylic, Pencil, Colored Pencil, Ink+ Crayon on Paper, 230 x 150 cm (Copyright Guillaume Bruère)

I also think it works very organically this way. What do you wish to achieve with the books? Of course, it's about sharing with the public, I understand this, but why such an undertaking to do an entire series of books (aside from the collection being so large)?

I really like the unexpected. I'm sometimes really surprised by myself: what I like and what not. I cannot say that it's only this direction or that direction; it's just emotion that gets me. In general, I am a very emotional guy, not a logical guy. This isn't me. Most of the things I do, even in my normal business, the decisions come from my emotions. It has taken me a long time to be able to talk about this—if you had asked me the same question ten years ago, I wouldn't be sure what to say. Now I feel that I'm no longer too shy to talk about emotion, and especially through the artworks I can share and communicate emotions.



Imi Knoebel, Anima Mundi 2014-11, 2014 Acrylic on Aluminum, 46 x 36 x 6.8 cm (VG Bild 2016, Courtesy of Imi Knoebel)

I like how each book you've done is different; you could buy one book on its own and it's in a way a complete idea. You could buy, for instance 'Placed'—the edition just focusing on the sculptures in your collection—and it's in no way incomplete. I mean, of course you need to see it in context with the rest of the collection. Yet, when you look at the entire series of catalogues, seeing how the project, organization and design of the books has developed through each edition, I feel it kind of speaks for the collection as a whole and how the collection has developed through the years (you learning more about how your collection should be presented vis à vis how you've developed in collecting art. The first book started as simple idea, and then you get clearer and clearer on how you wish to present it.) There's a very human side to it...

What no one probably believes really is that I am so involved in the details. I couldn't do the book by myself. I'm happy we have such a good team, with their weak sides and powerful sides. The people working on the book do a good work and I feel we are a good team. And we see some developments and hopefully we can continue this way.



Erik van Lieshout, Danielle (sister), 2013, Mixed Media on Paper, 151 x 261.5 cm (Courtesy of the artist + Galerie Krinzinger, Wien)

You have quite a mixture of painting in your collection; Do you think you'll show everything? I mean, for instance, you started out collecting Italian Painting, right?

Yes, and this will be very interesting. I was hesitant when we were discussing the book, if these paintings I collected in the early days have the right quality, but I'm very surprised that after such a long time I think you will see from a selection of these older Italian paintings, the level of quality. I also think by the way we found out that some of the Italian artists featured in the book also have a so-called comeback currently in Italy. It has nothing to do with us, but sometimes, the same thing happens in different parts of the world.





Anton Henning, Portrait No. 417, 2015, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 50 cm (VG Bild 2016, Courtesy of Arndt Fine Art)

I think it's interesting to show your collection in Berlin, because on one side Berlin is very international, but also—especially with painting—it's very set in this mindset of 'German Painting'. I mean, Italy has their idea of painting and people here have little knowledge about any of them.

Italy is a really rich country culture-wise, but not so well recognised internationally for contemporary art. There are popular artists in Italy, but just a few are internationally known. It's strange, because I think that it has nothing to do with the quality.

No, it's of course more about whose eye they catch and who collects them, and what shows they get into and that's how really the status of the artist is set. So, if I understand your history of collection correctly, it was that you just liked art in an aesthetic sense and you just started collecting works you liked, not really based on the names—a bit auto-didactic in a way. I really respect your eye for quality and how multifaceted the collection is. Looking at the series of catalogues you have made from the collection, they show a lot of different angles on how you collect (not just painting, sculpture, photography, Asian Art, etc.) Isolating just one artwork from the collection and looking at it, it's very intellectual. I'm not sure if an art adviser could have done it better...

and I couldn't work with an adviser, I really like to go by myself to shows because you need a kind of concentration. I don't like to have to make conversation with people every two minutes, saying hello or something. It's a bit of a disadvantage that a lot of gallerists know me already; I prefer not to talk with them when I'm looking at work—maybe later, the third view, not the first view (laughs). The first view I need for myself.



Norbert Schwontkowski, Woman with White Skirt, 2009, Oil on Canvas, 50 x 40 cm (Courtesy of the artists and CFA Berlin)

I was speaking to a few artists about you as a collector, and the consensus is that a lot of artists respect you for your eye, and the fact that you aren't trying to use their works to make a name for yourself, and that you are also very fair with prices, not trying to always get a discount because you are collecting. You are not coming in and trying to use them. I got a really warm and positive energy from how they spoke about you.

This is absolutely not my business. I mean, my business for me is another thing, but art for me is a form of relaxation. It's completely the opposite: my normal work deals with engineering and figures, and everything must be very precise and correct, so it's a different world. It is so different from the other stuff that I am doing that I really enjoy it.



Valérie Favre, Ghost (after „The Three Witches in Flight“ from Goya“)
2014, Oil on Canvas, 40 x 30 cm (VG Bild 2016, Courtesy of Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin)

So both worlds— business and art collecting—balance each other out? The technical and the emotional? I'm trying to scratch the surface with you a bit, because I feel like there's a lot of depth to what you are doing. For instance, as you were showing me around your collection a few years ago in Herford, after spending two or three hours looking at you collection non-stop, I asked you how much of the collection we had seen at that point, and you said 'mmmh, maybe 1/10 of the entire collection.' What started with a curious interest in art has become this massive collection, but still, I really get the feeling like you know every single piece (more or less)

I should! (laughs) At least. Someone once asked me if I would be willing to sell something I mean, honestly some of the earlier pieces I bought are not in the top quality, compared to what I collect today. I wasn't experienced at all but as I told you already I am surprised that quite a few of the earlier paintings made it in the book. Not everything, but most of what I bought in the early stages will be in it and this wasn't selected by me. I'd also say that I like this way of freedom, that the people I work with, and this is also a guideline in my company is to keep my people on a long leash, so to say. I like being treated like this myself and freedom for me is important. So my team Philip and Ulrike are also doing things for our projects on their own. Sometimes we even have struggles, but this is normal for human beings, but through this you find the possibility to compromise. The development of this book was also up and down. In the end, I am really happy about the result because it's so different from the other books we have done so far. You see a development and this is a new challenge and I'm keen to get the result. I shouldn't talk about the result, but this is already the second or third time that something unexpected happened and I like unexpected things.



cover of ABOUT PAINTING, featuring painting by Michael Sailstorfer (VG Bild 2016)

Featured Artists: Darren Almond, Stephan Balkenhol, Georg Baselitz, Miriam Böhm, Guillaume Bruère, Sandro Chia, Primo Conti, Valérie Favre, Simon Cantemir Hausi, Anton Henning, Robert Holyhead, Massimo Kaufmann, Imi Knoebel, Liu Wei, Lu Song, Mino Macconi, Gualtiero Nativi, Michael Nowotny, Hans Op de Beeck, Sebastian Lloyd Rees, Ottone Rosai, Michael Sailstorfer, Erik Schmidt, Norbert Schwontkowski, Serse, Shen Fan, Peter Stauss, Pascale Marthine Tayou, Marianna Uutinen, Erik van Lieshout, Jorinde Voigt, Jan Voss, Brigitte Waldach, Frank Wiebe.

20 – 21 April 2016.

ABOUT PAINTING: Book + Exhibition by the Wemhöner Collection

Book presentation + Opening: Wednesday, 20 April, 7 – 10 p.m.

Potsdamer Strasse 83 / 10785 Berlin / (Galerie Judin) / 20 – 21 April 2016, 12 noon – 12 noon

ABOUT PAINTING will be published in April 2016 by Kerber Verlag. ISBN:978-3-7356-0201-5; format:24 x 28 cm, ca. 240 pages with numerous images; hardcover with dust jacket, German/English.