

LENA MACULAN, PARNASS

## STEPHANIE PFLAUM, BREAK OF STYLE.

Stephanie Pflaum does not simply paint pictures, but builds them up by mounting various materials in several layers on wedge frames, which are then stacked in some parallel layers. The exchange of different planes was already a leading theme in her early work, which she has subsequently developed into the third dimension. The pictures are stacked next to each other or in piles, and they are installed either directly on the floor- in a vertical position in front of the wall, or horizontally- similar to showcases- carried by steel supports, or even hanging in a position parallel to the ceiling and in this way being linked up with each other, similar to a ribbon running all through the space.

As she was bored and convinced of the commutability of painting, it soon became too restrictive and shallow for her. „Two dimensions were no longer enough for me. The crossover painting moving between sculpture and installation in space proved to be the best medium due to the possibilities of documentary representation of processes of thought. Furthermore, the solitary images standing all alone turned out to be too limited, and therefore it came to the point where I assembled them. This finally resulted in a space-picture, an installation“. Despite this evolution in her work, the artist undoubtedly still sees herself as a painter today.

The sensuality of the materials- be it plush or transparent acryl-colour mixed with air and looking like spittle, as well as the symbolic meaning of the objects integrated on to the pictures- play an important role for Pflaum. Objects including shells, edelweiss, a plastic brain, wallpapers, running carpets, embroideries, broken china, collage-photos and mirrors, which in most cases do not refer to each other in an obvious way, are united in the picture and thus enable the viewer to perceive the ideas evoked by these items in a new context and to see new meanings through different eyes.

Her critical focus on symbols is based on a serious interest in art history as well as on philosophy. Be it items she made herself, found objects or everyday things, to Pflaum all objects have symbolic character. And by removing the symbols from their usual context and rearranging them in the picture- be it Christian, national or other symbols- she reveals the manifold levels concerning the meaning of symbols. This element of versatility in meaning is also reflected by forms which appear like openings, on the one hand recalling both crying and laughing mouths, and on the other hand perhaps representing wounds or a vagina.

However, nothing in her work is coincidental. Each element of a picture has its own special place, just as each picture takes a specific place within the overall installation. Moreover, each picture expresses a certain mood or deals with a dominant idea, which is then carried forward in the succeeding pictures. By means of arranging the planes of the picture one after the other, ideas are developed which spread out on both sides and conquer the entire space also due to the lateral alternation of layers. As a result, the pictures appear to be conceived systematically and strictly in order, even if this strictness is continually interrupted by formal elements as well as by an ironic theater-like performance of symbols.

Breaks, wounds and destruction are common themes in Pflaum`s work. Image elements such as torn and burned pages of books, as well as mangled pictures point to both frustration and anger. Is it not possible for you to find answers to disappointment? Are you unable to think clearly in an angry state?

„These breaks are like moments of quiet reflection in a process of thought, or moments of doubt and disharmonies which permanently accompany me, and so they are not meant to give rest to the viewer. Islands of rest do not exist, either in life or in my work“.

Through her presentations in the Schömer Haus, the Tabakmuseum and the Semperdepot, Stephanie Pflaum already had the opportunity to introduce her work to the Austrian public. After two group exhibitions and one single exhibition in September 2003, the artist has now been a fixed part in the programme of the Heike Curtze Gallery for about four years. „Stephanie Pflaum is one of the most interesting artists of her generation, her innovative power and artistic courage, both mixed with humour and intelligent working strategies, are indeed convincing and can be even considered rare qualities“ (Heike Curtze). By means of her shows in the Staatliche Museen Kassel Neue Galerie and in the Mike Weiss Gallery in New York, this 32-year old winner of the Womens` Art Prize 2003 has now truly arrived on the international art scene.