

ARNDT & PARTNERS/WOHNMASCHINE GALLERIES:  
BERLIN, GERMANY/SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER, 2005  
JOINT ANTON HENNING EXHIBITS

"27 MAINLY QUITE APPEALING SCULPTURES"/arndt  
"LA RETOUR DE LA CONFERENCE"/Wohnmaschine

Published in "Sculpture" Magazine, May 2006

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The German artist Anton Henning has dual shows in Berlin this fall at Arndt and Partners and Wohnmaschine galleries. "27 mainly quite appealing sculptures" at Arndt and Partners maintains the usual rigorous level of intensity in Henning's recent painting/sculptural installations. Using the sensuality of oil paint, light, wood and art historical imagery, the installation is a meditation on joy and seduction. Each of the two galleries at the space is a cacophony of images, objects, sculptures, painted wall installations and Le Corbusier inspired chairs entitled "Arbiter" symbolizing and scrutinizing the act of the viewer.

Henning invites the specter of nineteenth century artist Gustave Courbet to set the tone for the discussions and issues that ricochet energetically between each object and painting. Dialoging with Courbet as if he were a contemporary colleague, Henning establishes the foundation of the installation with a sculpture entitled and based upon Courbet's 1866 painting "The Origin of the World." He places Courbet's in your face image of a vagina, concentrated and miniaturized, into the drain of a porcelain washbasin, entitling the 1996 piece "L'origine de la sculpture." Forcing the viewer to look down at the original, though appropriated, image by Courbet, Henning directs the viewer's gaze away from the traditional horizontal interaction with a painting on a wall. He suggests an idea of life that is inverting backwards into its originary state.

The crowded gallery spaces seem at first visually challenged by layers of works in vitrines, objects upon pedestals, large Modernist chairs, light boxes and vivid abstract or realist paintings on the walls. On the one hand, Henning's overcrowding of space with art objects and

concepts, is at times, relieved by the clarity of his thought process. On the other, connections between the objects and paintings sometimes droop into obscurity and it is difficult to tell if this is an intentional conceptual tool or Henning's being overwhelmed by the amount of ideas he uses at one time. The work is not stingy, it is refreshing to see art that is overflowing with well conceived content even if it does, at times, threaten to overwhelm the work itself, if not the artist.

The second gallery is also foregrounded by a Courbet inspired work entitled "L'origine de la sculpture, No. 2." Conceptually referencing the 1996 work in the first gallery this piece resembles a predatorial vulture, a large bricolage-esque lighting apparatus hovers menacingly over small version of one of Henning's rotatable painting pedestals, a fabricated wood cube which, in this case, is balanced on its tip and is flanked on each side by modernist inspired oil paintings both in imagery and painterly styles.

Wohnmaschine gallery has a less crowded installation at a more viewer friendly volume without the full-on Henning assault of intensity. "La Retour de la Conference" includes one large rotating painting pedestal and several paintings. Although largely a two-dimensional show, Henning's quirky lighting system handles light as a sculpting material instead of as enhancement or a specific directional tool. With light boxes built into the picture frames and the rotating painting pedestals, it becomes a performative, even celebratory tool for Henning. He uses light to give the work a self-consciousness about its own presentation; the manipulatory effects it has upon the viewer revealing the presence of camp. In all of his recent work, camp is a conceptual and visual aid Henning uses to move fluidly between the many languages of visual modernism.