

SVEN HOFFMANN - AN ARTIST WHO PAINTS WITH FIRE

Characteristics of Art in nowadays post-modern times, have the tendency of erasing the lines among different types of art and develop totally new mixing techniques.

Painting, sculptures and photography, yet strictly separated in the last century, are combined in various ways and compacted in a single work of art.

One of these modern art alchemists is the Berlin photo artist Sven Hoffmann who provokes sensations with his special burn-art-technique over the borders of the German capital.

It is a rather sophisticated, laborious and risky procedure in which Sven Hoffmann makes his colorful, luminous and dazzling work. With photos, hardly do his works have anything to do. In the final stage, they look more like luxuriant paintings. But since they are welded on solid wood panels, aluminum plates or thick metal blocks, they appear to the viewer more likely as three-dimensional art works and embrace a plastic figure.

The exterior appearance of Sven Hoffmann's works arouses the curiosity of the observer. He wants to know the emotions and feelings his works result in, and thus his works encourage to open a dialogue with the artist, with his approach and his own knowledge of art involved.

"Burn art" is Sven Hoffmann's developed technique continuously elaborating for processing photographic materials. He photographs in a similar way, then exposes and develops his films in his own laboratory. With the help of fire he burns and melts his footage carefully. This creates bladders, distortions and color confusions that are effectively incorporated by the artist. The gathered photographic paper artwork is enlarged, again modified, and then laminated with adhesives on wood or metal.

Thereafter, the base material is welded, burned, and bent towards the photo. Besides, the electrical welding equipment is an important technical aid. As a trained industrial mechanic, Sven Hoffmann has learned mechanical skills and knows how to deal with such devices, but not in a mechanical way, yet in a highly artistic manner, much like a painter who works with brush and paint. He "paints" with the welding equipment!

Sven Hoffmann is a Berliner to the core, and wants to use the metal active gas (MAG) in his strange, bizarre and sometimes crooked photo fantasies, and also recognizes a corresponding trace of typical Berlin life and the art of improvisation.

In his childhood and youth, he got to know both sides of Berlin, the eastern and the western parts. He was born in 1969 in East Berlin, and later immigrated to West Berlin with his parents. He completed an apprenticeship in mechanics in the electric bulb factory Osram and then worked several years in the company. The technical skills that he acquired were used in his artistic potential and helped him to develop his own distinctive Craft, Art and Photography. In 1992 Sven Hoffmann traveled with his mentally ill father to Thailand, hopefully, to find a cure there. The unhealthy status of his father showed very little improvement during the one-year stay, but Sven Hoffmann, only 23 years old then, discovered what creative abilities he could seize for his art. He made sculptures as a painter and welder, from free, recycled materials, and discarded art objects, without guidance.

In 1993 Sven Hoffmann returned back to his hometown and found an interesting and instructive work. At the Volksbühne in Berlin, he worked as an actor playing small roles and had the chance to work with brilliant directors like Christoph Schlingensiefel. He was involved in the production of the project "Kühnen 94", a very controversial attempt at that time to explore the reasons why young men, especially in East Germany, are fascinated by the neo-Nazi.

In 1995 Sven Hoffmann went for two full years to Costa Rica, most probably to get away from the constant stress that came from the permanent care and support for his needy father. In the Central American small country, which looks far different from the image the tourist brochure made of it, Sven Hoffmann was active as a development aid worker. He worked together with local artisans as a carpenter and manufactured furniture on driftwood.

On a trip to New York he bought equipment for photochemical work. Back home in Berlin, Sven Hoffmann operated first as a craftsman, but then used more and more time and effort on developing and perfecting his photographic art.

Since 2000 he has worked in Berlin as an independent artist and earned his money at first, especially with orders of photo agencies, especially in advertising. He is mainly self-taught, possibly because there are currently no predecessors and role models in his sector. His masters are not photographers, but artists such as Matisse, Monet and Chagall. He wants to learn from the masters how to deal with light and shadows, with colors and shapes, not to copy them, but to compare himself with them and to make his own way to find his own style.

Examples of his light and dark works like "Alexanderplatz" show how much Sven Hoffmann is connected to Berlin. The motifs are well known, they show the former center of East Berlin with the world clock and the television tower. But the photo-artist shows the remains of the GDR past in a new, pale, rather nostalgic way. The scorch marks are not to be overlooked, smoke seems to descend upon the scene, the scorched and crooked wooden frame gives the whole picture a little burned atmosphere. The place seems to have its best days behind it; it only survived from the past. Obviously Sven Hoffmann is drawn to morbid, dry, inclinations. His techniques to rework the film with heat and fire, is especially apt to give his productions a very unique touch. The artist plays with fire and sets his material on fire, but he keeps the burning process under control and can thus reach his burn marks. Although the final product may look randomly done, nothing is left to chance in the development. Everything is well thought of, carefully planned and well-targeted.

Sven Hoffmann sets frames with the help of aluminum and steel on three-dimensional scene and makes oblique, crooked, somehow burnt down artistic creations in different colors and with Graffiti marks. Instead of looking like an open window, a big hole opens in the middle of the picture. It is expected to see a grayish scene but instead a familiar place is there. People in summer clothes are sitting together on benches and chairs, chatting and enjoying the beautiful day. On another wall painting, a bright yellow tram breaks a weak wall. People feel to be reminded of Tennessee Williams "A Streetcar Named Desire" from the play of the same name: a tram on the way to the "Endstation Sehnsucht". The powerful house wall behind it has traits of a human face. The viewer can recognize groups of people, as if the crumbling

house wall begins to tell stories that have happened behind the walls. The Abyss gives a deep insight.

The burn-art work is distinguished by the importance of details, for example in the work "Around the World" a donkey pulls up a loaded bicycle behind him. Behind it stands twisted block of houses, with windows partially covered with drying suspended bed linen. Sven Hoffmann's "Schlittenfahrt" is rather a satiric contribution to the constant gender debate. A high rising woman with a cat-face mask is commanding and giving orders on a sled and holds all the reins in her hand. A man is pulling her, imprisoned by the reins and other leather chains around his head and body. He almost crawls on his four legs.

Sven Hoffmann is an extremely versatile artist, both in terms of choice of subjects as well as in means of expression. An intricate masterpiece of his burn-art is his collage with the wonderful title "Hoffmanns Gedanken" a classic based on Jacques Offenbach's operetta "Hoffmanns Erzählungen". The artist has a diversity of urban and industrial image quotes literally fused together: cranes, bridges, banners, streets and house fronts. The result is a colorful and vibrant kaleidoscope, a symbol of modern urban life.

But Sven Hoffmann is quite different, much more expressive, passionate and impulsive. The series "Emotions" show this side of his personality. The burn-art artwork with the name "Love" symbolizes a fiery glowing heart, a volcano of melted iron ore - firmly pressed into a hidden metal frame. The opposite corresponding work is called "Hate". It is no less ardent, but the fire seems cold, full of anger and bitterness. Love and hate seem like the flipside of the same emotion.

Sven Hoffmann's feelings and emotions can be so strongly expressed that one of his works carries the name "Pain". Countless steel nails drill into the skull of a man who seems to burst with agony. This allegory of human suffering speaks for itself in a visual language that can be understood by the whole world despite all linguistic and cultural differences.

Sven Hoffmann referred to his independent "burn-art" as "expandable". Photo art is not the end but only the beginning of his artistic accomplishment. He has shown what he can do. I'm sure he can do much more. He has the makings of a great artist. It will be interesting to be informed of further productions.

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