

KATZ CONTEMPORARY

The Unbridled Worlds of Lutz & Guggisberg

Konrad Bitterli

More disruptions in the space of art? Dimly lit by isolated lamps and spotlights, to the soft accompaniment of a sporadically heard soundtrack, an uncommonly homey ensemble presents itself to exhibition-goers: a comfy living space in the peerless tradition of Swiss furniture stores, a bourgeois living room in the refined style of Better Homes and Gardens, flaunting all that's been familiar since childhood immemorial: tables, chairs, stools, floor and reading lamps timeless design, functional bookcases filled with weighty literary tomes and bibliophile gems, with a few oddly off-beat objects in between that have no explicitly defined purpose but becoming nicknames like "Gulu," "Officer's Torte," or "T Engineeress." Cozy and sedate bourgeois homeliness seems to have invaded the White Cube of art, ordinarily aseptic cut off from the outside world, except for the fact that a soft bed of straw has been laid out on the floor, subtly but irresistibly evoking the inimitable atmosphere of a lowly stable for cows or horses.

Indeed, the installation, first presented by Andres Lutz and Anders Guggisberg in the year 2000 at the Raum für aktuel Kunst in Lucerne and afterwards at the Kunsthalle St. Gallen, deals only superficially with the arrangement of more or less familiar objects, that is, with the incursion of the profane into the hallowed halls of art, already successfully practiced generations. Instead, in their ensemble, tellingly titled *Rare Animal Furs All*, the artist duo Lutz/Guggisberg exploit that now familiar strategy, tried and tested in recent art history by a spectrum of artists ranging from Tobias Rehberger to Sylvie Fleury, as a kind of provisional stage. And being clever directors, they produced a tightly woven fabric of idiosyncratic, mental associations and convoluted, contextual references, which are gradually impressed upon viewers they walk through the staged tableau—through the comfortable living quarters or, to be more precise, the comfortably appointed library.

This stage or locus of action has been furnished with dozens of everyday objects and items, some of them found, others brilliantly hand-made or carpentered by the artists. In front of the wallpaper, a collage of hundreds of seemingly random newspaper clippings, cheap IKEA bookcases have been erected among the sculptures to house a substantial library. Makeshift reading desks and tables of cardboard with glass or wooden tops as well as comfortable chairs with side tables and floor lamps provide a cozy corner for viewers to rest for a while or even lose track of time on becoming engrossed in the reading matter. The tables are so brimful of oddities, they could easily vie with an alchemist's chamber: maps of the world painted on glass, enigmatic found objects like gnarled driftwood and bulbous roots, curious sculptures reminiscent of modern art by the likes of Jean Arp, an ersatz laptop and, of course, books from the 'library' looking as if they were lying around at random. The bookcase itself is overflowing with countless, cherished publications and trophies displayed with the greatest of care. All of which necessitates a word of caution to book lovers: the titles can be found in no other library; they are products, one and all, of two riotous imaginations: encyclopaedias, belle lettres, scientific publications, art books and even exquisitely trashy dime novels, like the story of errant Knight Unbert..., published by "Bastion."

Biographical Annotations or Supposed Trials and Tribulations

Andres Lutz and Anders Guggisberg: freewheeling artistic omnivores with protean creative skills. With Gerhard Mei Andres Lutz forms the linguistic maestro duo, "Geholten Stühle," whose programs combine effortless, light-footed theatre, art performance, slide shows, and elements of slapstick, thanks to which they bagged the renowned European theater award two years ago, the Salzburger Stier. Anders Guggisberg has long been an artistic and musical cohort i workshop of Pipilotti Rist and does more than dabble now and then in musical composition, performing as an uncompromisingly 'soft' musician with, among others, accomplice Lutz's above-mentioned "Geholten Stühle." Given al supposed trials and tribulations, it certainly comes as no surprise that this collusion of interests and occupations has produced extraordinary synergies and unbridled conceptual enterprises. To wit: sculptures, large and small, mountai concocted books, and dozens of invented cups or trophies for such impressive achievements as "did Mr. Schutz's laundry for fifteen years and is satisfied with a steamboat ride" or "saw the truth and shared it with everyone." But these are onl a few aspects of what has come out of the Lutz/Guggisberg coalition since its founding in 1996. The duo's endlessl rearranged and recombined ensembles present meditative lounges and futuristic cockpits, cozy living rooms and c bedrooms, fictional libraries and museum collections. Their installations of unbridled minutiae, like Rare Animal Furs deconstruct our world of ordinary functions and experiences and reconstruct it in a parallel universe that is as subtl is unfathomable, taking shape as a dense fabric of visual and mental references to an idiosyncratic cosmos entirely of their own invention.

Libraries between Science and Fiction

From the all-embracing installation to the single book, from the macrocosm to the microcosm: the eternally mutati library appeared in the installation, Advice, as a cool soporific balloon-landscape, evoking nightmarish monsters (Zuri Helmhaus, 2000), in Rare Animal Furs All it was tidily lined up in bookcases, and in Mangistan, camouflaged as a c stylish sideboard (Centraal Museum, Utrecht). Essentially libraries, as repositories of books, stand for thousands of y of knowledge, accumulated and preserved by civilization; they are places that symbolize the idea of ordering and structuring our collective heritage, as exemplified, for instance, by the positivistic thrust behind the rise of encyclopaedi in the 19th century. Lutz/Guggisberg send up this heritage. If you reach for one of their books, you will not encounter pages of scientific findings or exciting fiction but will instead find yourself holding a plain wooden object. The books cleverly designed dummies, their exteriors made to look deceptively similar to the books of familiar publishers with the help of computer graphics and Photoshop tools. Even so they are still usable, that is, readable, in their own way: dus jackets, author's names, and cover blurbs are full of sideswipes at famous pen pushers, well-known series, and clas book designs, as well as being larded with lusty, playful allusions to personal stories or artistic models, all revamped wi guileful glee.

As in real life, the Lutz/Guggisberg collection of dummies also includes an encyclopaedia—in addition to scientific, l religious, and foreign language publications. Or the "Rahmen" mini-series, a take-off on the famous Reclam pocketbooks in design and intent, with classical literature yet to be discovered, such as Vollbert Freiherr von Hansen's Der Stirns Unbock Friedfeind Hänggi's Dramen or Gottbock Unfried Ruhländer's Der fünffache Hermes. The irresistible charm of scientific

publications and the spirit of academic research are found in such scintillating titles as Werner K. Spotlight's long-term research into *How Can I Be Appropriately Perceived?* or Erwin Green's *How Can I Honestly Enjoy the Suc of Others?*, while popular, more topical issues are addressed in such books as *How Do I Pull a Modern Theme Park out of a Hat in Timely Fashion? Vision, Planning, Funding, Execution*, penned by the writers' collective Bürki, Gränicher, Hänggi and Thomson. This prolific, multi-talented trio (Thomson having retired) are also responsible for a number of further publications, including *On y va! 24 Leçons de la langue française*. Moreover, it is quite possible that the same Ansel Hänggi created the rather scandalous literary protagonist in *The Monk and the Laser*, published by Obi-Wan Press. T latter collection of short stories is an eye-catcher with its literally visualized title showing a priest against the backdrop of a gaudy light show. Another eye-catcher is Brian Eppstein's *The Airbag Inn*, a collection of stories published by Nomadi with a dizzyingly mad blend of text and visuals. On view is a night photograph of a mobile home-balloon installation, ti too much everything no. 1, which Lutz/Guggisberg put up themselves in 1999 in the Message Salon run by Zurich's nomadic art dealer Esther Eppstein. In fact, the books produced by this artist duo are an ebullient melange of lingu invention and visual wit, refreshingly absurd combinations of image and text, and complex, ambiguous references themselves and others. Thus, in analogy to the Airbag Inn, they mince no words in reviews of their own exhibition activities, as demonstrated once again in the lavish volume *Five Positions in Space*. Published in 1997 on the occas an exhibition in the fictional Kunsthalle Hallau, it shows the gallery in Lucerne where the artists actually later showed thei Rare Animal Furs All—though without the contributions listed in the catalogue by Dieter Meier, Dieter Roth, Dieter Bachmann, and Dieter Schlegel.

As with the above-named writers, the most diverse creative fields collide in Lutz/Guggisberg's bibliophile collections fact, in every single one of their faked books. Boundaries between artistic genres are willfully disregarded by linking pictorial and linguistic elements, by turning text into cover pictures and, conversely, pictures into titles or cover blurbs and—incidentally—making a wondrous contribution to the genre of the artist's book, so popular among cognoscenti such a first-rate hodgepodge of artistic activities, intricate ambiguities, and contextual references, a kind of metadi emerges not only about literature and art but also, quite generally, about art and life. Lutz/Guggisberg's library undermines traditional artistic terminology and cultural delimitation, as Dada or Fluxus did before them, but the duo are very much children of their own age with their unabashed penchant for hyperbole in endless, insanely rampant and sublimely sophisticated concoctions. Their collected books are not merely a repository of cultural and educational z despite wooden insides, a cogent symbol of world content: a bibliophile cosmos of brooding, indeed melancholy orders life and art.

Models or The First Great Solo Exhibition?

The First Great Solo Exhibition by Lutz/Guggisberg contains everything that could conceivably belong to any proper presentation of contemporary art: monumental paintings, realistic and otherwise, wall-to-wall wall paintings, colorful photographic wallpapers, along with classical photo art in superbly marketable art-trade format, modest museum tabl chic museum benches and complex models, space-filling or literally space-shattering objects, cool minimalist sculptures and maximized museum scenarios. For once the world of art and of the museum in general appears in unexpectedl colorful, overwhelmingly multifarious guise, in a wild array of stylistic directions and bubbling over with an effusion of ideas—here a voluptuous Jason Rhoades, there a cool Roni Horn, in between a painting by Sigmar Polke, a pinch of Andreas Slominski or Mark Wallinger,

perhaps rounded off by the inevitable display of the van Lieshout production. Altogether a presentation of immoderate artistic excesses that blasts the linguistic confines of the term "solo exhibition" and which even the most jaded of connoisseurs would no doubt rank among the most exciting new arrival on the swarming stage of recent contemporary art. And naturally, as in the days of the much-criticized slogan of "anything goes the line between high and low, between media and expression, between art presentation and amusement park vani into thin air—think of the useful tips in all life situations in the book *How Do I Pull a Modern Theme Park out of a H Timely Fashion?*—until any categorizing classification into cultural districts seems to have little more than faux theoretical value. However, Lutz/Guggisberg did not present this exciting show in any of the trend-setting venues of contemporary art, but rather on a table-sized ground plan of 160 by 350 centimeters in the approximate scale of 1 to 10: *The First Solo Exhibition* is a model.

The museum as a model. Haven't legions of contemplative art practitioners, not all too many seasons ago, pondered with varying degrees of profundity the whys and wherefores of the institutionalization of art and its attendant specific conditions of production, on one hand, and habits of perception, on the other? Indeed, the idea of the museum as could actually serve as a model case study for potentially art-critical reflections or fundamental debates on aesthetic surface, this does not seem to apply to Lutz/Guggisberg. Their model exhibition is far too light-footed, too playful full of allusion, an effervescent artistic phantasmagoria. But caution. Behind the tomfoolery there is more than meets proverbial eye, namely, earnest inquiry into the conditions that currently prevail in the art trade, for the model offers conceptual exploration and mirroring of real givens in the space of art. Typically, however, Lutz/Guggisberg's first solo exhibition and recent museum models vaunt none of the finger-wagging mentality that may on occasion unpleasantly adhere to 'art about art.' To begin with, they approach their subject matter—contemporary art—with refreshing detachment; they succeed in miraculously overstating all the exaggerated smugness of the so-called art trade which with characteristic self-irony, making no bones, in their "first great exhibition," about hankering – at least until recent for a museum finally to recognize and honor their exceptional talents.

On Model and Parallel Worlds in the Universe of the Absurd

From the museum as model to a miniature vision of the world: *The First Great Solo Exhibition*, like other miniatures that have come out of the Lutz/Guggisberg workshop, does not primarily comment on the world of art, as demonstrated by the model train landscape that would make any little boy's heart start thumping were it not for the mountains of potatoes under which it is all but buried. Tipped upright, the ready-made as a model tableau becomes a panel picture and is thus divested of its function. That is exactly what all of these works are about. Thinking in terms of, or rather building models, produces a kind of manageable artistic experiment somewhere between mental sketch and concrete implementation: a potentially real design in miniature format—half fantasy, half world. This living-room-compatible game plan for art has in fact enjoyed undiluted popularity for some time now. Take, for example, Fischli/Weiss, who pushed the yearning for an overview to gloriously absurd extremes in a work of 1981, *Suddenly This Overview*, consisting of 180 small sculptures in which the lofty and sublime cheerfully rub shoulders with the lowly and mundane. Or Thomas Hirschhorn who constructs visual commentaries on our contemporary world and its times. Or Manfred Pernice's hybrid constructions.

By refusing to yield to definitive conversion into the reality of purely functional, purpose-oriented conditioning because, as Stephan Berg wisely remarks, the symbolic "surfeit of their non-utilizable pictoriality would be reduced or vanish altogether," these models are always teetering between functional construction and aesthetic deconstruction. Intrinsic to them is a fundamental ambivalence of the kind exploited, for example, by Fischli/Weiss in their malicious subversion of middle-class normality and every decent Swiss citizen's devotion to order, while Lutz/Guggisberg's miniatures tend to adopt the nature of hopelessly odd and funny visions of a world full of stories and meaning-generating (cross) references to constructed and lived realities. Lutz/Guggisberg thus prove to be not only diligent fine artists but, on occasion, equally diligent disciples of other linguistically and theatrically creative foremen of the absurd, like the engaging master, Ionesco. And the things once staged in miniature by the duo, that is, their (museum) models, have now come into their own in the space of the real temple of the muses in the form of those very same parallel worlds so brilliantly cloned by the artists in their installations, cockpits, lounges, and libraries. Or conversely and differently put: The clever, material self-restraint displayed by the artists in their libraries or book dummies becomes consolidated certainty in these ebullient model architectures and worlds. Phantasmagoric worlds of absurdity, worlds full irony and wit, but also fathomless, stray odysseys are revealed in the art of Andres Lutz and Anders Guggisberg, offering all of us the liberating opportunity to ponder the world of museums and realities—and to do so with a guaranteed and substantial dividend of pleasure.

Translation: Catherine Schelbert

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