

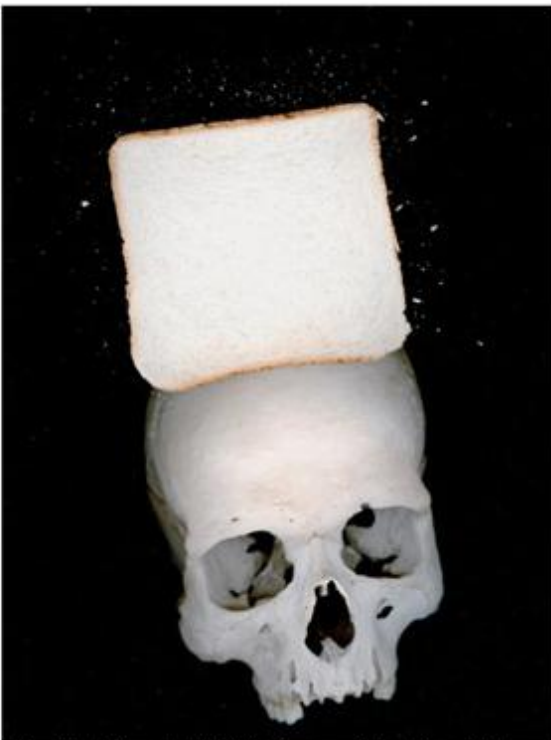
HEIKE MUNDER ÜBER FABIAN MARTI

Für unsere neue Serie "Radar" fragen wir jede Woche Sammler, Kuratoren, Dozenten und Kritiker nach ihrem aktuellen Lieblingskünstler. Diesmal: Heike Munder, die Direktorin des Zürcher Migros-Museum für Gegenwartskunst über den Schweizer Künstler Fabian Marti.

Das Medium der Fotografie gehörte für mich zu den Mitteln, die technisch sehr weit ausgereizt sind und selten mehr Überraschungsmomente bergen. Doch die Zürcher Kunsthochschule produziert diese immer wieder aus ihrer Fotoklasse, die schon seit langem für guten Nachwuchs sorgt.

Damals Daniele Buetti, später dann Shirana Shabazi oder Stefan Burger und vor nicht all zu langem Fabian Marti. Die künstlerische Methode von Fabian Marti (*1979) beruht auf dem Einsatz von Scanner und analoger Fotografie. Das Vorgehen, über den Umweg des Scannens zum Bild zu gelangen, lässt trotz technischer Präzision auch Spuren wie Staub und Kratzer zu einem wichtigen physischen Element werden.

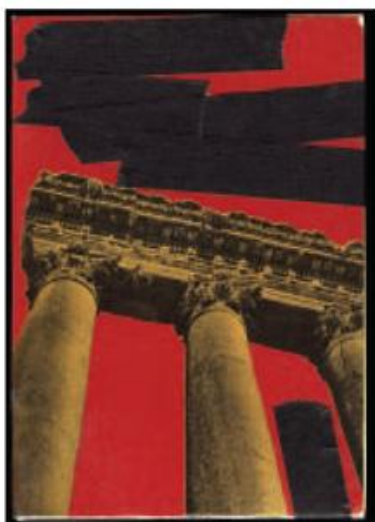
Und genau dies macht die Fotografie von Marti so ungewöhnlich, denn sie ist von einer mysteriösen haptischen Präsenz. Seine Symbolik greift auf christliche Metaphern, Undergroundsymbole oder esoterische Zeichen zurück, wie in "The Rise", ein Foto mit einem stark vergrößerten goldenen Daumen auf schwarzem Grund. "The System", "The Inspiration" oder "The Future" (alle 2008) scheinen als würde Marti die Tarotkarten von Alistair Crowley neu auflegen wollen.



Fabian Marti, "Brot & Tod", 2005 (Courtesy: Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zürich)

(Turning The) Back To The Future

William Gibson, qui en fut un temps intronisé pape (version cyberpunk) n'a de cesse de le répéter : la science-fiction n'est plus possible car la réalité actuelle contient plus de zones d'ombres que notre imaginaire ne peut en générer – a fortiori en ce qui concerne la science et la technologie. Ses dernières oeuvres s'attachent à déchiffrer un passé immédiat sur lequel on peut encore avoir quelques prises. Au-delà de cette ligne, la parole et l'imaginaire butent. Or plus que tout autre genre, la science-fiction a besoin d'inventer des mots. Le néologisme est la condition sine qua non de la création, par extrapolation ou translation, de ces mondes futurs.



Mais depuis 2001 et la fin de l'odyssée de l'espace, l'imaginaire est devenu plus noir et la figure majeure de la culture populaire est le zombie, le survivant au milieu de l'épidémie. Les films *28 semaines plus tard*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Phénomènes*, *[REC]* etc, réactivent avec force un courant déjà ancien mais jusqu'alors marginal. Et si *Cloverfield* (J.J. Abrams, 2008) s'écra-sait lourdement, c'était en révélant in fine la cause du cataclysme. La menace n'est même plus identifiable à un Mabuse / Ben Laden qui cristalliserait toutes les inquiétudes : d'un instant à l'autre, le familier devient l'altérité et vice versa. C'est l'horreur, c'est-à-dire l'indéfinissable, l'innommable qui attend l'humanité : le cri remplace le mot.

Dans ce contexte, les objets de la science-fiction survivent comme les traces étranges d'une époque qu'on ne comprend



plus où des vaisseaux décollaient vers les cieux dans un mouvement d'élévation et d'espoir. Et le versant dystopique n'en était alors que le revers, exprimant la peur que le progrès ne soit pas si évident ou immédiat. Mais dans une époque où le survivant est le héraut, cette alternative n'est même plus envisageable.

Aussi l'exposition *Science & Fiction* qui occupait la cave de la Générale à Paris du 20 janvier au 20 février 2008, s'accommodait, on ne peut mieux, de ce sous-sol un peu sale et délabré. Dans ces couloirs blafards, les oeuvres y développaient une dimension hermétique et mystique digne d'un avenir crépusculaire : si elles sont envoûtantes, les œuvres n'en sont pas moins mutiques. Le choix des commissaires a été clairement de situer l'époque de la science-fiction dans un futur d'après la civilisation, et non, par exemple, comme une projection technologique : ainsi les formes ésotériques de Lauris Paulus (comme cet œilleton triangulaire qui laisse apparaître une cascade,

les monolithes vibratoires de Benjamin Hocart ou les collections, entre moulages et gravats, de Thomas Klimoski entreposées sur les étagères d'un musée qui n'existe pas encore.

Il n'est pas anodin que les *Récifs* aigus et froids de Cédric Alby soient sous-titrés *Le jour d'après*. Quelque chose, un événement, a transformé le futur en un passé sans fin, irrémédiablement aphone et amnésique. Mais cette fiction, c'est celle de l'exposition elle-même, et rares sont ceux qui en l'occurrence ont embrassé ces paradoxes temporels de manière explicite, à part Fabian Marti. Sa science-fiction se trouve dans les bacs de soldes, dans les puces qu'on parcourt un samedi après-midi. Les visuels rappellent une époque que l'on a connue, puis oubliée mais les titres et les textes ont disparu, recouverts par une couche de scotch noir. Se risquer à le retirer, c'est déchirer le livre. Mais de toute façon, la plupart n'ont pas résisté au temps et leur désuétude a effacé d'elle-même leurs noms de nos mémoires.

Le geste de Marti n'est pas si différent de celui de Gerard Byrne qui, dans l'oeuvre *1984 & Beyond*, faisait rejouer par des acteurs les discussions des grands pontes de la science-fiction sur un avenir qui nous semble maintenant anachronique. C'est le présent qui recouvre le monde du futur, comme dans *Ubik* de Philip K. Dick (1969) : le futur d'une autre époque qui s'est perdu. Sans cet horizon qui se profile, la frontière est ténue entre habiter les formes du présent et entretenir un réseau de signes fétichisés où l'objet d'art devient une relique. †

Florent Delval

• www.la-g.org



I AM MANY

— Vincenzo de Bellis

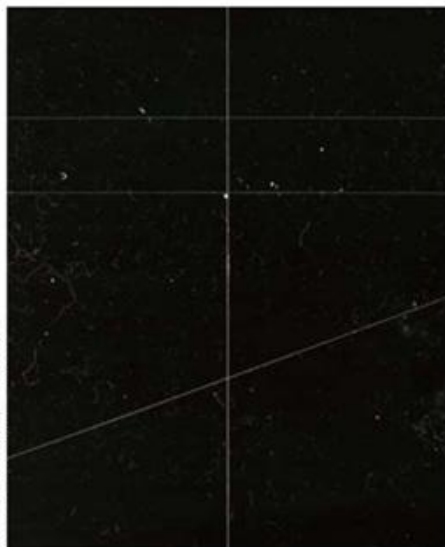
The imagery in Fabian Marti's photographs and sculptures comes from different sources and reflects his fascination with a wide range of subjects. From medieval and Gothic symbols to pulp sci-fi novels, Marti appropriates existing images and mixes them up to create a strange and personal world composed of classical themes such as vanitas, and underground culture and music. Skulls, crosses, runes, crystals, but also Minoan vases and African women populate a body of work whose beginning and end coincide in the artist's persona. Vincenzo de Bellis recently interviewed the young Swiss "artists", realizing that he had to talk with more than one..."

Who is Fabian Marti?

My main medium. An integral part of my work consists of exactly that question. I believe that in the beginning we are empty buckets, and throughout our lifetime this bucket gets filled with experience. So the question is who do I want to be? I want to make myself. Art as a way to create an identity.

What does that mean, exactly?

The artist has to invent himself. I think that it is best to lead a biographical life, which means a life that is worth being written down. This idea, which I like very much, goes back to Nietzsche. I'm interested in the question of what it means to be an artist. The artist is someone that decides to become an artist. All I do in my life is to be preoccupied with myself. Every work I create becomes part of my identity or my identities. I try to immerse myself in my work. Maybe it is a bit like a Method Acting. I become my work. At least temporarily, I try to believe that what I make is important.



Fabian Marti, Mousse, 2007. Courtesy Galleria Fonti, Napoli



This way your story strictly becomes the story of your work. Can you tell me how you started out?

I recently read an article on Huysmans. Apparently before he wrote his most remarkable book, *À rebours*, he worked in the manner of Zola, even joining the group of the Naturalists. But all of a sudden he decided to shift drastically towards a radical aesthetic literature, the decadent movement: Des Esseintes, the main character of the book, lives secluded in a manor in the countryside, in a completely hermetic world, where he pursues useless research. A nice image for the artist of today, who is free to explore whatever he wants. In this story, I recognize a parallel to my own biography. Originally I started out using my camera to document my surroundings, my milieu. I would take lots of pictures of my friends. But then I decided it was time for a change. My milieu wasn't that exciting after all. I let myself drift into a more artificial world. A world where I am fully in charge.

Photography is your main medium. You both take your own photos and use existing images. What arouses your interest in each case?

When I use found footage, the images come from very different sources. For the images in my very recent work, I used imagery out of magazines from the '50s and '60s, while for my Kaleidoscope series I collected covers of pulp books from the '70s and '80s, and sometimes I find images on the Internet. It doesn't really matter where they come from. The main interest for me is that they spark something. This can be at the level

of form or content. I try to find a symbolic meaning in their strangeness, one that doesn't reveal itself.

As you said I also create images using my camera or my scanner. As with the found footage, I try to "find" my pictures. Usually I have a vague idea of what I want to come up with as a picture, but in the process of making the picture, I let coincidence become part of it. I also try to go in directions that seem odd to me, or doubtful, that way I attempt not to reproduce what I already know.

Your imagery filled with mysterious and esoteric signs. I'm thinking, for example, of *Komposition für einen Rhombus*, in which a mirrored profile of a naked woman holds a sword that is aimed towards the centre of her chest, or *The Rise*, which shows a golden thumbprint on a black background...

I believe that all knowledge from past centuries, the entire timeline, is inscribed in humanity. Not in the sense of intellectual knowledge. More as an instinct or an emotion. This goes back to a vision I had on a mushroom trip. For me is a fascinating fact, it opens up a contemporaneity that bears the possibility of mental time-travel. Therefore I use archetypes in my work. That might be what you are referring to as esoteric. The idea is to attract the viewer by using these ancient and widely known schemes. But it all happens on a merely formal basis. In *Komposition für einen Rhombus*, the title says it all; even if you seem to recognize Christian iconography, it might only be about

the white rhombus, a basic abstract form, created by the crossed swords. I like paradox, I play with the expectation that a symbol normally transports something well-defined, but I try to take it to where it flips into the opposite. For example, in one of my best-known works, *Brot & Tod*, two forms (a skull combined with piece of toast) are put together, a simple composition that becomes complex and erratic.

In 2007, you presented sculptures for the first time. How do they relate to the photos in the exhibition space?

I started using clay to make sculptures as a way to expand my practice. I wanted to work in a more direct way, with my hands. I wanted to get dirty. I see it as a very archaic thing: creating something out of earth. I compare it to the material I use in photography; somehow it is dirt too. There is a material side to photography that I try to reveal by inviting the enemy of photography: dust.

I try to accentuate this material side in juxtaposing the photography with my ceramics. For example, in my show at Galleria Fonti in Naples a year ago, I assembled a walkway made of 15 square plates of wet clay. I would walk along the path wearing my leather boots and a walking-stick. This path led from the door of the gallery through the whole space. The imprints I made would dry over the course of the exhibition. After the show, Fonti had the plates fired.

You often use the scanner instead of camera, placing the images or objects to be depicted directly on the scanner glass. You start scanning with the lid left open, and this creates a dark background. When you do this placing the analogue photos, this process emphasizes the materiality of the photography with dust spots, while when you place the object directly on the surface the result is that the objects depicted have a three-dimensional feeling. What's the reason behind this?

It gives the depicted object an iconic presence.

If I think about *Kaleidoscope* or *Abstract Cross*, just to cite a few, I might say you often create works in terms of series. If this is correct, it implies a pleasure for archiving materials, gathering them together, finding your own sense. Could you tell me what generates the archiving mechanism and how this applies to the work?

I don't think my work is about archiving. I use the archive of history and art history as a collective memory. In my work you'll find images that work as icons. They stand for themselves. Like my piece *Hundhund*, which means "dogdog". The title works tautologically as does the image; two negatives of the same dog are put on top of each other. On the other hand, I make what one could call series, and here I use a certain type of image. I feel that sometimes an idea needs seriality to develop its content. There are certain kinds of images that need to be played out in order to show their whole spectrum.

In your recent solo show at Peter Kilchmann, you presented a series of images displaying Minoan vases, horse reliefs and bronze sculptures, as well as African women dancing in a trance state. As in previous works, you distorted the images by applying masking tape...

I wouldn't say that is a distortion, it works as an abstract layer over the found images. I look at it as a possible multiplication of the ways images can be read, and the lines serve to unify the pictures. The two spaces of the gallery work as communicating recipients. In one space, you find images that represent Western culture. In the other space, you see five large-format images of an African dancer in a trance. This work, titled *Spiritual Me*, stands for the artist producing his work in a state of total loss of control. Of course this is a romantic vision, but it's also an ideal to me. The dancers surround a wooden structure in the room, which takes up the idea of the line as it connects different pedestals on which rest ceramic sculptures. The structure maps out the space and can be viewed as a madness machine, enabling one to reach an altered state of mind.

Who is Martin Biafa?

Martin Biafa is one of my alter egos, an anagram of my name. I started my career by deconstructing my name. It uses the same letters, but names and symbolizes another identity. Like the title of my show at Galleria Fonti in Naples says, "Sono Legione", I am legion, I am many.

So "Fabian Marti Vs. Marti Biafa": who am I talking to now? You are talking to "Vs".

Künstlerisches Krisenmanagement

Fabian Martis installative Arbeit in der Galerie Peter Kilchmann

In seiner Ausstellung in der Galerie Peter Kilchmann stellt Fabian Marti Fragen nach der Domestizierung des Wahnsinns. Die ästhetischen Oberflächen seiner Arbeiten werden von einer kritischen Dimension gebrochen. Sie sprechen eine Thematik mit aktueller Brisanz an.

In Krisenzeiten, wie sie gerade anzubrechen drohen, finden nicht nur Psychologen und Strip-läden Zulauf. Auch alles Mystische bekommt Zuspruch. Dem Unerklärlichen wird mehr Platz eingeräumt. Ein Künstler, der sich bereits zu Beginn seiner Laufbahn, in der schönsten Boom-Zeit Ende der Neunziger, mit dieser Thematik befasste, ist Fabian Marti. Der 1979 in Freiburg i. Ü. geborene Fotograf bearbeitet seine Bildvorlagen mit Stift, Klebestreifen oder durch teilweise brachiale Einritzungen und bläst sie ins Überdimensionale auf. Die Motive sind von alten Symbolen, Runen oder mythischen Sphären wie dem Schamanismus geprägt.

Seine derzeitige Schau in der Galerie Peter Kilchmann treibt die Thematik in einer museumsreifen Installation aus Fotografie und Skulptur auf die Spitze. Im Hauptsaal scheint eine fünffach reproduzierte Stammesfrau in Trance um die Betrachtenden herumzutanz. «Spiritual Me» heisst die Arbeit und steht für den Versuch Martis, gänzlich gedankenlos und frei von Restriktionen zu arbeiten. Die Geste ist eine Zelebrierung des Künstlermythos und dessen kritische Hinterfragung in einem. Eine verflochtene Holzstruktur, die sich durch den Raum zieht, dient einerseits als Sockel für Keramik-Objekte und schafft ander-

seits eine Allusion zu den Linien, die sich über Martis Bilder erstrecken.

Im zweiten Raum finden sich Motive, die das kulturelle Erbe der westlichen Gesellschaft symbolisieren: eine Picasso-Reproduktion («Le Printemps aux Fous»), die Abbildung minoischer Gefässe («Philosopher and Shrink») und eine grosse Giacometti-ähnliche Figur, die eine Schlange in der Hand hält («L'Homme Qui»). Diese Motive stehen als rational begründeter Gegensatz zur intuitiv agierenden Tänzerin. Verbunden werden die Räume durch die Abbildung einer Tropfsteinhöhle, die als von der Natur hervorgebrachte

Skulptur beide Sphären vereint. Laut dem Künstler ist diese Zweiteilung ein Hilfskonstrukt, das er schafft, um für ihn wichtige Fragen zu formulieren. «Der Wahnsinn wird in unserer Gesellschaft schlichtweg ausgeblendet», sagt er. «Dennoch brodelte er irgendwo unter der Oberfläche und kann jederzeit ausbrechen.» Tatsächlich durchdringt diese kritische Dimension die wunderschönen Oberflächen von Martis Arbeiten wie kriechender Nebel. Die Thematik ist durchaus brisant – gerade zu drohenden Krisenzeiten.

Karolina Dankow

Zürich, Galerie Peter Kilchmann (Limmatstr. 270), bis 20. 12.



Der Wahnsinn brodelte unter der Oberfläche: Fabian Martis Picasso-«Bearbeitung» in der Galerie Peter Kilchmann.

PD

Time Out, London, Jan. 18, 2008

Exhibition of the week

Fabian Marti

★★★★★

Alexandre Pollazzon

Soho to Hampstead

At the risk of further banging on about the creeping neo-gothic tendency in contemporary art, along comes another show with the same drumbeat. This time the mood is of sword-wielding knights siring naked damsels to an imagined soundtrack of hippy wind chimes and '70s soft rock. Recent Zurich art grad Fabian Marti clearly reads too much pulp science fiction, rifling old book stalls for folksily illustrated covers that he then distances further with black tape, concealing the author and title. Shame, because works like 'Drive-In' and 'La Force Mystérieuse' really begin to resonate if one bothers to read the captions. Instead it's up to the images to exude a musty air of bygone fantasy, Marti's point being that you don't need to read the titles to imagine Earth populated by robots-gone-bad or misunderstood sentient aliens.

Marti's dark end game is to create *memento mori* by scanning things on his desktop Epson. Giant photos of crystals, heathen runes and Christian crosses are all blow-ups of objects placed on an A4 scanner, with specks of dust and rogue hairs adding an extra layer of visual static. The blackest



'Composition for a Rhombus', 2007

pieces, propped up and left out of the show's hang, have a deathly pull that belies the show's fruity title 'Fruchtzimmer'. All we can be sure of is that Marti's a fantasist in the long neglected tradition of Dungeons & Dragons or those choose-your-own-adventure books. *Ossian Ward*

ROME

Piero Golia and Fabian Marti

ISTITUTO SVIZZERO DI ROMA

Italian artist Piero Golia and Swiss artist Fabian Marti conceived of their collaboration “Ruins, Regrets and Visible Effects” in an ingenious way: an exhibition on two levels, where the main attraction was the membrane joining the inner and outer areas of an elaborate installation—a liminal space reminiscent of a “third landscape,” a nether-world between natural environment and artificial construction, as formulated by landscape architect Gilles Clément. A twisting architecture of plywood arches, columns, and tunnels—designed by Marti in consultation with Golia—unraveled, like catacombs rising to the surface. The walls were colored in five different tones, reproducing the plays of shadow generally created by exhibition spotlights. The resulting environment was disorienting, not only in its initial impact, but even upon further observation.

The architectural structure became both support and container. The exterior of this armature displayed photographic works from Marti’s series “To Be Titled under the Influence,” 2009, as well as ceramics created in situ during his residency at the Swiss Institute in Rome. These are objects with defined but malleable forms—distorted vases, but also ashtrays and a large dog striking a pose (*TINMLO MZL IOM RF MJTJSM*, 2009). Foregrounding the originally soft material, the artist allows his process to remain apparent: Signs of manipulation are visible and any equilibrium appears precarious. The sculptures were scattered around the structure, covered in incomprehensible writing (the titles of the works), and thus attested to Marti’s tenacious display of expressive freedom, an optimistic openness to free association. A duality based on the use of superimposition prevails in both the sculptures and the photographs. While the sculptures, with their black-and-white palette and glazed surfaces, become akin to images of the objects they represent, the photographs instead tend toward a sense of three-dimensionality. Combining found images or his own pictures into collages of unrelated scenes (their surfaces sometimes



View of "Piero Golia and Fabian Marti," 2009.

covered in dust), Marti digitally scans the resulting arrangements to create photographic images of spatial ambiguity, playing with our sense of depth.

A roughly two-foot-wide opening in one of these photographs led inside the structure; crawling into the shadows amid the odor of wood, one came upon seven hidden works by Golia. The viewer unexpectedly confronted pieces such as *19 Mercedes Hood Stars Ring*, 2005, a framed, circular chain of Mercedes-Benz hood stars, and *Concrete Cube with Juicer*, 2007, a Philippe Starck fruit juicer set in concrete with its legs protruding, all created recently but rarely or never exhibited. The arrangement formed an atemporal passage through this artist's oeuvre, removed from the context of Marti's formal references to the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, with their allusions to the scientific and the subcultural. Rather, Golia's sequestered work turned inward, toward a personal past, one culled from the oxymorons and artifacts of American popular culture. Not only visible but also invisible ruins, a kind of postindustrial melancholy, remained.

—Francesco Stocchi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

FABIAN MARTI

PETER KILCHMANN - ZÜRICH



FABIAN MARTI, Exhibition view, 2008. Courtesy Peter Kilchmann, Zurich.

Once more, Fabian Marti leads his viewers through the history of mankind. For this exhibition he has combined a new inkjet print series with four new ceramic sculptures and an enormous wooden structure that also serves as a plinth. As in some of his earlier works, he uses a collection of found pictorial material: he has worked on numerous pages from magazines dating from the '60s to the '80s, with a draughtsman's line, using charcoal or

black adhesive tape. But the completed product is not the "original collage," it is simply used as a model for the scanning process that Marti has institutionalized.

Marti puts three-dimensional objects — in this case mushrooms arranged in a particular way — on the scanner's glass plate, as well as photographs he has taken himself and found pictorial material. Then it is not just the objects placed on the scanner or the image that is translated into two dimensions: so much natural light gets into the machine that the flat image acquires a spatial depth of intergalactic darkness.

Marti has concentrated mainly on large-format black-and-white and color pictures of prehistoric and archaeological finds from magazines — Romanesque vases, horse reliefs and bronze sculptures. As well as this evidence of historical high culture, Marti also chooses reproductions of modern paintings and a photograph of a black African woman in a trance.

Marti lends an aesthetic quality to these old and venerable artifacts merely by reproducing them in enlarged form, but he

distorts them to the same extent by his formal interventions. He is both recreating a piece of human history while also introducing us to a contemporary discourse on adapting art history.

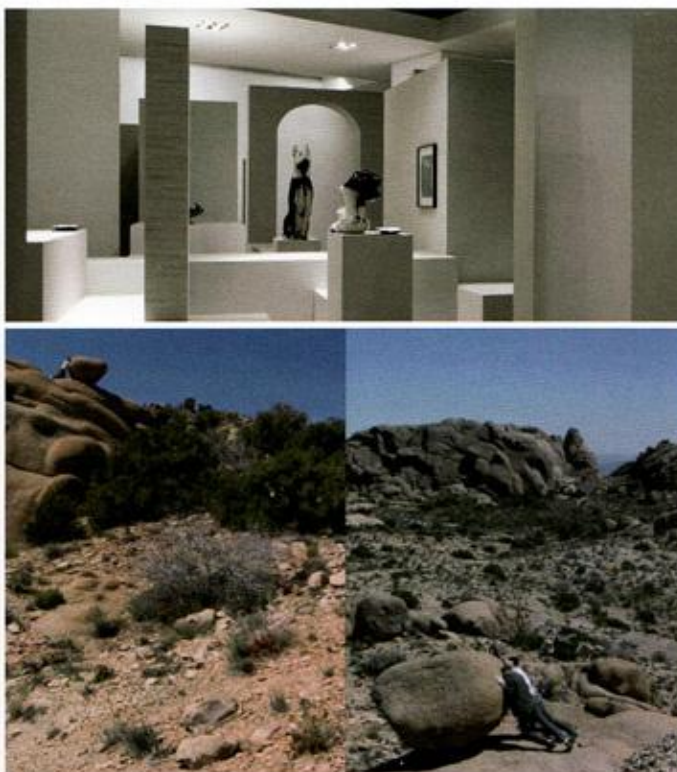
The African woman dancing in a trance can be read as a self-portrait of an artistic type who has fallen captive to shamanism or as a metaphor for existence as an artist. Marti himself has this to say about it: "I believe that all knowledge from past eras — the entire time-line — originates in the human being. Not only in the sense of intellectual knowledge, but also as regards instinct and emotion. Basically, these pictures are replaceable and, in my opinion, are all on the same level."

Fabian Marti is an outstanding connoisseur of the epochs, making ancient and modern, photography and sculpture, and even figuration and abstraction collide. He develops compositions that are creatively quite simple, formal kaleidoscopes, but opens up a discussion of some complexity.

(Translated from German by Michael Robinson)

Alexandra Blättler

BRAND NEW



Fabian Marti

Salvatore Lacagnina

Looking at Fabian Marti measuring a table designed by Ettore Sottsass, I asked, "What are you doing?!" "I am going to do it exactly the same," he answered.

SALVATORE LACAGNINA: Who are your muses?

Fabian Marti: My muse is the will to be an artist.

SL: What is your weakness?

FM: I am very much in need of being adored.

SL: What is a challenge for you?

FM: The challenge is to never accept what is, but at the same time to use what is to one's advantage.

SL: How do you avoid trends?

FM: I make them.

SL: Who influenced you most as an artist and why?

FM: Francis Picabia for his now. Helmut Federle for his purity. Jack Goldstein for being honest. Helio Oiticica for his yet to be discovered. John Armleder for his kindness.

Steven Parrino for combining superman with Malevich's square. Beatrice Wood for not giving a fuck.

SL: For your new body of work you collected African 3-D masks bought on the Internet and integrated them into the work. How come?

FM: I've always liked the idea of appropriation — thanks, Elaine Sturtevant! African masks immediately connect to the avant-garde of the early 20th century, so they reach an art historical level; also their mystical and ritual aspect together with the fact that masks evoke portraiture fascinate me.

SL: How did you start combining digital imagery and photograms?

FM: I started using my scanner as a camera. Later I would use the negative film to draw on by scratching lines into it or by doing micro collages on it, in order to later blow it up. Working with Photoshop I realized that most of the effects

stem from analogue effects. So I wondered what would happen if I merged effects done in Photoshop with effects done in the darkroom.

SL: You founded the artist-run space Amberg & Marti in Zurich in 2006. What was the idea behind it?

FM: Annette Amberg and I lived in the "hip" neighborhood of Zurich. At some point we thought: "Why not to use it as an exhibition space?" The idea to make shows in our own place seemed very interesting. But it was also a way to introduce talents to the public: Pamela Rosenkranz and David Hominal had their first Zurich exhibition at Amberg & Marti Zeigen.

SL: You recently started working with film. How did this come about?

FM: I was a student at The Mountain School of Arts (MSA) in Los Angeles where I met the Italian artist Federico Spadoni. We would hang out a lot together. One day we decided to drive out to the desert.

It was a very intense experience; coming from Europe one never experiences such vast, untouched terrain. We came up with the idea to do a 'reversed' Land Art piece: not to add something to the landscape but to take something off. We saw this huge boulder that was sitting on a cliff, much like in the famous Warner Bros. cartoons. We wanted to tip it over. So, a couple of weeks later we drove back to the desert with two sets of HD cameras. One would film the stone from beneath, the other from the top. Unfortunately we couldn't get it to fall off the cliff.

SL: What would readers think if they knew that I never asked any of these questions?

From left clockwise: Lucide Dreams 1952, 2009. Gelatine silver print, 30 x 40 cm. Courtesy Peter Kilchmann, Zurich; Fonti, Naples. Installation view at The Swiss Institute, Rome (2009). Fabian Marti and Federico Spadoni, To Be Titled, 2008. HD video, 16 mins. Courtesy The Swiss Institute, Rome.

ARTFORUM

Fabian Marti

HANS-TRUDEL-HAUS

Obere Halde 36,

March 4–April 22

Fabian Marti is an expert maker—or shamanlike conjurer, say—of totemic images. See, for instance, *Brot & Tod* (Bread & Death), his oddly mystical 2005 image of a piece of sliced bread atop a skull (sacrosanct and sacrilege at once). His latest exhibition, however, finds the Zurich-based artist making use of actual totems, namely a faux African “primitivist” mask he found on the Internet. The mask’s familiar kitsch, in a range of eerily modified versions, pops up in surreal photograms that mine late Francis Picabia paintings, and in a series of three-dimensional white masks pierced by two white sticks (both crucifix and grid).

Playing provocateur and examining modernism’s obsession with primitivism, Marti also considers museological display and the exchange between analog and digital cultures. To that end, his photograms feel both analog *and* digital (the spectral images begin in the computer and end up in developer baths). The white masks, meanwhile, appear nearly digital: fragmented into parts and pixels, a kind of cubist-animist digital animation. These individual works are brought together by the pyramidlike structure the artist built to display them on. Comprising a series of stacked pedestals (which add up like a game of Tetris), the installation seemingly cuts through the gallery’s three small, stacked floors. Bookending the installation, and adding to its heady admixture, are two large photographs of magical fungi. The ghostly images’ sincere spiritualism complicates the critique available elsewhere, imbuing the exhibition with a nearly utopian ethos. Nevertheless, the question remains of whether “primitive” cultures will always be reduced to consumable goods for consumer cultures like ours.



View of “Fabian Marti,” 2010.

— Quinn Latimer

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Flash Art

FABIAN MARTI

FONTI

Fabian Marti destruttura e ristrutturata, secondo un linguaggio e un'estetica estremamente personali, la simbologia, la modalità, la formula del racconto per segni, in un universo che propone della sacralità l'aspetto più semiotico e pagano.

"Sono legione" — questo il titolo della mostra da Fonti, la sua prima in Italia — è tratto dai Vangeli di Marco e Luca, quando l'indemoniato risponde a Gesù di essere posseduto da "Molti" — infatti "demonio" deriva dal greco *daímonai* che significa dividere, lacerare. L'artista ha recuperato e attualizzato questa definizione per descrivere i diversi ruoli che l'uomo assume nel corso della sua vita. All'interno di un circo rappresentativo strutturato secondo canoni estetici propri dell'essenzialità e del minimalismo, Marti costruisce un percorso espositivo che parte da due grandi stampe fotografiche, la scansione delle sue mani fotocopiate, come a sottolineare che la paratenza inequivocabile del fare, dell'atto creativo, non può prescindere dalla manualità, dal gesto che dà forma e poi vita. E ciò viene sottolineato dai titoli delle opere che compongono il dittico: *A Life That Lasts Eternally* e *I Wonder That Life Will Be*.

La mostra continua attraverso un percorso in terracotta, sul quale sono impresse le impronte dei piedi dell'artista, che ci porta nel secondo spazio della galleria in cui altre opere a parete concludono la "passeggiata primordiale", gesto inequivocabile — la terracotta fresca su cui Marti ha lasciato il suo segno verrà stabilizzata nel tempo dalla cottura che avverrà a fine mostra — rappre-

sentativo di un passaggio, di un modificare attraverso tracce che diverranno Storia. *The Fly* è un grande pannello nero con una mosca scannerizzata e ingrandita; anche in questo caso l'artista assume un'immagine, la mosca, simbolo di Belzebù (da "Baalzebub", Signore delle mosche), riutilizzando la come in una *vanitas* contemporanea. Accostate al muro, ad angolo rispetto a *The Fly*, tre stampe fotografiche che rivisitano le Rune, archetipi di origine celtica raffiguranti le forze che regolano l'universo. Ogni Runa possiede un profondo significato che può essere usato sia per interpretare le influenze in atto, esterne e interne a noi, che per invocare un potere della natura o sintonizzarsi ad esso.

Altro lavoro in mostra, dal titolo palindromo *HA AH (A History)*, è una stampa fotografica di medio formato in cui Marti elimina i baffi dall'immagine di Hitler, attuando una sorta di castrazione della sua aura.

"L'esperimento non funziona completamente perché", come afferma l'artista, "guardando il ritratto non ci si accorge subito della menomazione, come se quei baffi riuscissero a mantenere la loro forza simbolica al di là della loro presenza fisica. E se Hitler non li avesse avuti, la Storia sarebbe cambiata?". Fabian Marti sembra serio... ce lo sta davvero chiedendo?

Gigiotto Del Vecchio

R E C E N S I O N I



FABIAN MARTI, HA AH (A History), 2007. Fotografia, 70 x 50 cm.



D'art, d'art

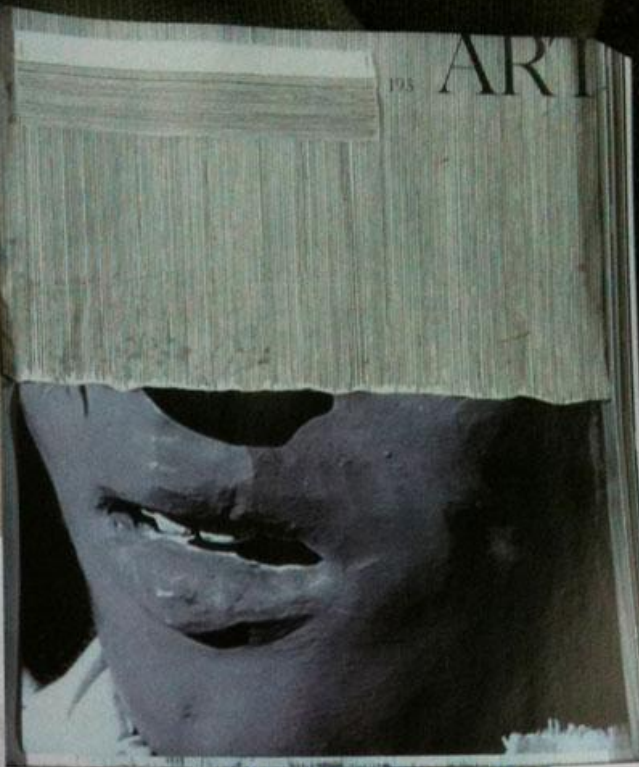
Puisque l'ART et la *MODE* n'ont *jamais* fait si bon ménage, l'entrée de saison est le *moment* IDÉAL pour sonder les *TENDANCES* du marché. Rien de tel qu'un *petit tour* à la dernière FOIRE de BALE pour prendre le *pouls* de ce qui a la *COTE*. Et de ce qui ne l'a plus.
Par NICOLAS TREMBLEY.

Chaque année au mois de juin, depuis plus de quarante ans, tous les radars de l'art sont pointés vers Bâle, en Suisse, où se tient la plus importante foire d'art contemporain du monde et ses nombreux satellites. Si peu d'artistes s'y déplacent finalement, c'est parce qu'Art Basel est avant tout l'épicentre du marché et que l'on y parle beaucoup plus d'argent, de cote et de valeur commerciale que de contenu.

Serait-il possible d'oser un parallèle des tendances telles qu'elles s'énoncent et se pratiquent dans la mode avec le fonctionnement du marché artistique lors de la foire de Bâle ? Sans doute, même si a priori une œuvre est censée transcender son époque pour exister au-delà de chaque saison et qu'elle n'est pas à considérer comme une simple marchandise ou un objet de consommation.

Pourtant, lors de la preview «First Choice» d'Art Basel, quand tous les collectionneurs triés sur le volet piétinent d'impatience en attendant le son du gong qui annoncera l'ouverture des portes qui leur permettra de s'engouffrer avec urgence dans la Halle 2, on a un peu l'impression que ce sont les soldes. Mais les prix de vente des œuvres prouvent immédiatement le contraire. Nous connaissons les besoins compulsifs de consommation du milieu de la mode, nous découvrons maintenant ceux tout aussi hystériques et impatients du milieu de l'art.

Ce marché-là, même s'il se maintient bien, a néanmoins souffert de la crise, et la dernière édition 2010 de la foire a prouvé que les valeurs sûres l'emportaient sur l'incertain. Les artistes confirmés, ceux qui bénéficient d'expositions dans les institutions



Parmi les temps forts de la dernière foire de Bâle, les œuvres d'AMY BESSONE (CI-DESSUS), DE FABIAN MARTI (AU CENTRE) ou CELLES, PSYCHOLOGISANTES, DE ROSEMARIE TRÖCKEL (EN HAUT).

accompagnées de catalogues et de textes critiques, n'ont pas trop de souci à se faire, alors que ceux qui ont été propulsés ces dernières années au sommet d'engouements financiers passagers et artificiels (comme les peintres chinois, par exemple), en font les frais et ne sont presque plus présents. Les collectionneurs, même s'ils sont avides, prennent leur temps, réfléchissent et discutent des prix. Pour résumer, exit les productions trop chères qui survivent surtout dans le second marché des ventes aux enchères et dont on ne retient plus vraiment les noms.

Cette année, les stands étaient beaucoup plus sobres et faisaient la part belle à des travaux historiques, plus intellectuels, à l'esthétique vintage. Si lors de certaines précédentes éditions, de nombreuses œuvres extrêmement colorées, dorées, même kitsch

FABIAN MARTI

**»Time for the monkeys to move
into hyperspace«**

Kunstmuseum Winterthur
14.4.-17.7.2011

OF APES AND MEN

If the eponymous monkeys are poised for their trip, Fabian Marti (*1979) has already undertaken a psychic passage; on the opening night of his Manor Kunstpreis exhibition he was entombed in a huge sarcophagus where he remained, visible only through a narrow gap, for the duration of the opening. This »dream machine«, entitled *Time for the monkeys to move into hyperspace*, (2011) was positioned in a small room adjoining the main space. The main gallery is populated by five white ceramic octopi contained in cubic boxes (*To be titled*) surrounded by six large black and white photograms (*Cosmic Laughter I-III and VI-VIII*) on the walls. A fine, spidery line of black vinyl travels around the perimeter, making uneven progress from floor level to ceiling, then progresses into the adjoining gallery. In the wake of the opening performance the sarcophagus lies there empty, its lid propped against the wall, a light at its head blinking ceaselessly, eerily white.

Photograms are a familiar part of Marti's practice. It's not the first time he has combined digital image manipulation with manual exposure in processing. The enigmatic works do not feature the impassive totemic masks seen before, but several hypnotic graphic spirals conjure psychedelic depth

and movement from the flat print surfaces. The octopi, meanwhile, are petrified in the act of escaping. What would have been supple invertebrates are frozen, yet none the less menacing for all that, as a couple of tentacles push up the heavy box lids to reach out. Despite the relative sobriety of the presentation, Marti's titles, poppy visuals and mysterious machines bring to mind an old-fashioned school of science fiction, when uncharted galaxies were there for the discovering. *Ladies and Gentlemen We Are Floating in Space* is a phrase that sticks in the mind; the band Spiritualised took this, the title of their 1997 album, from Jostein Gaarder's children's novel *Sophie's World*, which introduced the basic tenets of different philosophers. Marti's exhibition title echoes the cool tone and cryptic message of this sentence. In Gaarder's novel the declaration is made by inquisitive philosophers still on earth making the »perilous expedition to the outermost reaches of language and existence« but the public do not care to listen to what they report. Exactly who speaks with authority in Marti's exhibition title is not clear, and this play on agency pervades the show. Propped to one side of Marti's dream machine is a small canvas called *Johnny Graf for Fabian Marti*, made in collaboration with the other artist; its proximity to the site of Marti's meditative performance suggests an umbilical, nurturing link. Is Marti the engineer of tools for insights into an alternative reality, or is he the voice of a collective that is sending monkeys into the unknown? Or has he con-



FABIAN MARTI

Exhibition view / Ausstellungsansicht »Time for the monkeys to move into hyperspace«
Manor-Kunstpreis Kanton Zürich 2011, Kunstmuseum Winterthur
Photo: Gunnar Meier

structed a resonance chamber for distant mockery as *Cosmic Laughter* suggests? But hyperspace, notwithstanding the hugeness the elements of the word suggest, is not the unfathomed depths of space but a man-made virtual labyrinth of hyperlinks. Monkeys cannot chart a territory that only exists where we meet the limitations of our minds. Now that the artist has left the building, we are left like acolytes without a guru, teetering on the brink of something beyond the immediately evident, wondering whether to leap in too, or whether we have been taken in, then abandoned in an uneasy limbo of our own creation. It is to Marti's great credit that he can combine these elements with a light touch and let them play out so vividly.

VON AFFEN UND MENSCHEN

Wenn die Affen für ihre Reise bereit sind, hat Fabian Marti (*1979) schon eine Fahrt ins Übersinnliche unternommen. Den ganzen Eröffnungsabend der Ausstellung des Manor-Kunstpreises lang war er in einen riesigen Sarkophag eingeschlossen, nur durch einen schmalen Spalt sichtbar. Diese »Dream-machine« mit dem Titel »Time for the monkeys to move into hyperspace« (2011) wurde danach im Kabinett neben dem Hauptraum der Ausstellung platziert. Der Hauptraum wird von fünf weißen Oktopussen aus Keramik in würfelförmigen Kisten (»To be titled«) bevölkert, die von sechs großen schwarzweißen Fotogrammen (»Cosmic Laughter I-III und VI-VIII«) an den Wänden umgeben sind. Eine feine, spinnwebartige Linie aus schwarzem Vinyl läuft stufenförmig die Wände vom Boden zur Decke entlang in das Kabinett hinein. Dort liegt der leere Sarkophag wie ein Relikt, der Deckel ist gegen die Wand gelehnt, und ein Licht blinkt unaufhörlich an seinem Kopfende in gespenstischem Weiß.

Fotogramme sind ein bekannter Bestandteil von Martis Kunst; nicht zum ersten Mal kombiniert er digitale Bildbearbeitung mit manueller Belichtung in der Dunkelkammer. Die rätselhaften Arbeiten zeigen nicht mehr wie früher teilnahmslose, totemistische Masken, sondern hypnotische Spiralen, die eine psychedelische Tiefe und Bewegung aus den flachen Abzügen hervorzaubern. Die Oktopusse hingegen sind beim Versuch, sich zu befreien, versteinert. Die weichen, wirbellosten Tiere sind wie eingefroren und doch nicht weniger bedrohlich, drücken doch einige mit ihren Tentakel die schweren Deckel der Kisten auf. Trotz der recht nüchternen Präsentation rufen Martis Titel, seine poppigen Bilder und mysteriöse Maschinen eine alt-

modische Spielart von Science Fiction in Erinnerung, wo es noch unerforschte Galaxien zu entdecken gab. »Meine Damen und Herren, wir schweben im Raum«, ist ein Satz, der in Erinnerung bleibt. Die Band Spiritua-lised übernahm ihn als Titel ihres 1997 erschienen Albums von Jostein Gaarders Kinderroman »Sofies Welt«, der die Grundgedanken verschiedener Philosophen vorstellt. Der Titel der Ausstellung ist ein Echo auf den kühlen Ton und die kryptische Botschaft dieses Satzes. In Gaarders Roman stammt er von wissbegierigen Philosophen, zwar noch auf der Erde, aber auf einer »gefährlichen Reise an die äußeren Grenzen der Sprache und Existenz«; doch die Menschen kümmern sich nicht darum, was die Philosophen zu berichten haben. Wer in Martis Titel mit solcher Bestimmtheit spricht, ist nicht klar; dieses Spiel mit Stellvertretern durchdringt die ganze Ausstellung.

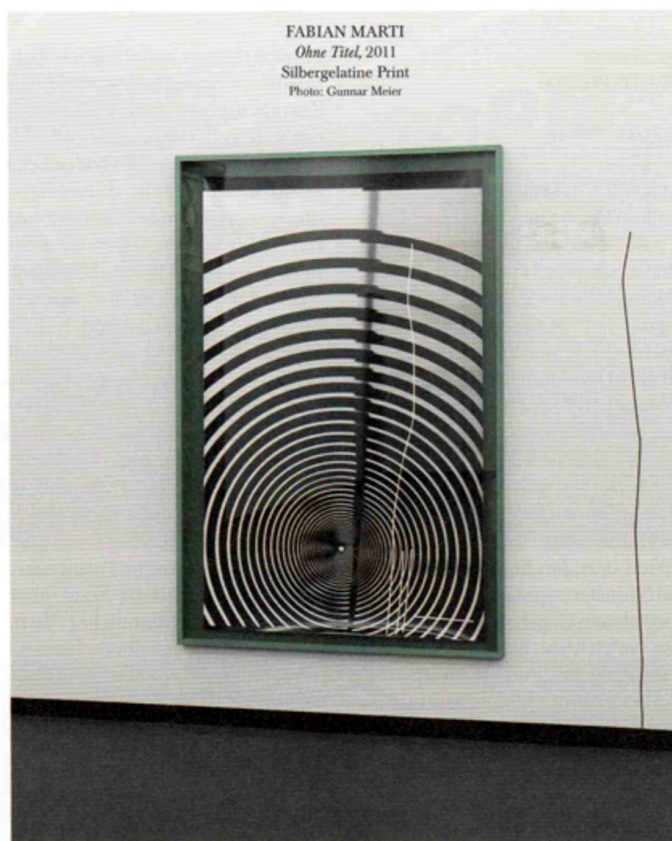
An Martis Dreammaschine ist eine kleine Acrylmalerei gelehnt, »Johnny Graf for Fabian Marti«, die in Zusammenarbeit der beiden Künstler entstand. Deren Nähe zum Schauplatz von Martis meditativer Performance lassen eine enge und nährnde Verbindung annehmen. Sind Martis Arbeiten Schlüssel zu einer anderen Welt oder sind sie

die Stimme eines Kollektivs, das Affen ins Unbekannte schickt? Oder hat er eine Resonanzkammer kühlen Spotts konstruiert, wie die Fotogramme »Cosmic Laughter« vermuten lassen?

Doch ist der Hyperspace, ungeachtet der ungeheuren Größe, die die Bestandteile des Wortes suggerieren, nicht die unergründliche Tiefe des Raumes, sondern ein menschengemachtes, virtuelles Labyrinth von Hyperlinks. Affen können ein Territorium nicht ausmessen, das nur dort existiert, wo wir an die Grenzen unseres Verstandes stoßen. Jetzt, nachdem der Künstler das Haus verlassen hat, bleiben wir wie Jünger ohne Guru zurück, am Rand von etwas jenseits des unmittelbar Einsichtigen taumelnd und fragen uns, ob wir hineinspringen sollen, oder ob wir hereingelegt und in einem beunruhigenden, von uns selbst erzeugten Nebel zurückgelassen wurden. Es ist Marti hoch anzurechnen, dass er all diese Elemente mit leichter Hand kombiniert, und sie so lebendig miteinander agieren lässt. —

AOIFE ROSENMEYER

Aus dem Englischen von der Redaktion





Burkhard Meltzer

Posters, pots and fingerprints

Modernity is marked by a great divide between man and machine, handcraft and mechanical reproduction. While some Modernists embraced crafts – think of Bauhaus – others like the Futurists favoured machines and mass production. The Zurich-based artist Fabian Marti uses hybrid methods like ceramics and photograms that straddle this divide. His works – marked by both the unique fingerprint and the repetitive grid – question the origins of creativity and authorship.

Consider Marti's poster *VRNTYNH ZLN CLGKNNMNLN WKOHZ Marti Keramik 0041765653946* (2011), which uses both mysterious codes and unambiguous contact details. The title could easily be taken for an advert for a building contractor: stating the product code, the contractor's name and trade along with a Swiss phone number. The poster features not only the title information but also a white ceramic pot. Although unglazed, its surface is fully formed: a tubby, closed vessel whose piled horizontal rings are sealed with a flat top that suggests a potter's spinning wheel – a motif that occurs repeatedly in the artist's ceramics. There is

also an irregular tangle of lines, drawn in various colours: from neon yellow to violet to green.

Since 2011, similar lines have appeared on the surface of many of the artist's other objects, photograms and architectural interventions. In the photogram *Youth! Youth!* (2011), layers of freehand overlap technical drawings. Hand prints appear across a grid of holes cut into photographic paper, which is also marked by scrawled lines. Some areas of the black and white image lie under a semi-transparent cloud of red, green and blue, clearly added after the image was developed. The production of a traditional photogram ends in the darkroom, but Marti keeps on adding newly hand-crafted layers to the surface of the photographic paper.

At first glance, the traces of his gestures have an almost abstract expressionist feel. Yet painterly categories can hardly be ascribed to this work precisely because it combines manual and mechanical means of reproduction. Hand prints appear throughout his oeuvre – on photograms, on ceramics and as life-size stickers (*End Egoic Mind*, 2010) – yet always

in the same manner, as if Marti were turning the hand print – the ultimate marker of individual and artistic identity – into a mass-produced product. Here, the artist questions the Modernist notion of a signature style with an ironic, literal reading of the fingerprint as photographic print.

In his latest film, *Because I Travel a Lot* (2011), we hear the voice of a woman narrator describing a return to a prehistoric culture, before tools and stylistic conventions. The recited text, from the late ethnopharmacologist Terence McKenna, explains that our received culture is a mere operating system which can be rebooted by using psychoactive substances. For McKenna, such drugs hold the key for overcoming 'Capitalism 5.0' and a return to the ancient 'animal soul' of humanity. As we listen, we see a ceramic object being made which resembles the one used for the *Marti Keramik ...* poster. In the hands of a skilled craftsman, a lump of clay becomes a round object, built up by laying bands of clay on top of one another and finished with

a coloured glaze. We hear the hypnotic spinning of the potter's wheel and a mix of muffled drumming and synthesizer sounds. The footage could well have been taken by a team of ethnographers, documenting a recently discovered exotic culture. After following every step of the production process, we see the finished ceramic once again but against a black background, as if it were already in a museum.

For his exhibitions, Marti often designs his own display units using MDF walls, plinths and items of furniture which are precisely made but tend to look somehow clunky. While he leaves signs of a direct physical contact with his materials, there's a playful distance to the resulting art works – a distance that effectively conceals the identity of the artist as the producer of both the works and their displays. By moving between anonymity and identity, he turns the creative impulse into a primal question: not only who and what makes art but why it is made in the first place.
Translated by Nicholas Grindell



