



künstlerhaus bethanien gmbh : press release

Berlin, 10th February 2010

Dear Colleagues,

Künstlerhaus Bethanien presents:

THE TOUCH OF HISTORY

YEE SOOKYUNG

HUANG MIN

HUANG HE

MURSHIDA ARZU ALPANA

JAN MUCHE

Exhibition: 19th February – 14th March 2010

Tuesday – Sunday, 2 – 7 pm, Studio 1

Opening: Thursday, 18th February 2010, 7 pm

Although all the artists of this exhibition are concerned with the specific pasts of their own political and art history, the exhibition *The Touch of History* addresses the need to deconstruct the past and critically investigates today's ideological certainties regarding the past.

The choice of exhibits is oriented on the continuing question of what the past signifies for the present in the course of social and international "systemic" changes, and seeks those images in which the past attempts to gain influence over the present. As the material of memory, documentary photos play a prominent role in this context.

The exhibition itself shows only works from the fields of painting, drawing and sculpture/object, presented by artists who come from South Korea, Bangladesh, China and Germany. They have selected different historiographical territories for this exploration of "their" history. In five case studies they recapitulate stories within history and investigate inter-textual contexts, thereby questioning chronological order as well as the artistic conventions of their own cultural spheres.

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YEE SOOKYUNG (*1963, Korea) | Yee Sookyung works with traditional Korean ceramics. The ancient technique was imported from China more than a thousand years ago, developed further in Korea and 'exported' from there to Japan in the 16th century. It is therefore to be expected that young artists take up this tradition, but only a few are bold enough to develop it a stage further. Those few include Yee Sookyung, who uses the leftovers of the traditional trade for her ceramic sculptures: she works exclusively with fragments that she has collected in the many traditional ceramics villages of Korea or has even dug up at closed-down depots there. She uses the fragments – which she assembles around an inner framework, trimming the joins with gold in a traditional way – to develop bizarre sculptures with a strange beauty, which the viewer perceives as true works of ceramic art.

HUANG MIN (*1975, China) | In her long-term project *Mountain River Landscape* Huang Min is producing a series of large-format paintings that she began in 2005. They show popular landscapes and their visitors, who – usually with their backs to the viewer and leaning over a balustrade – observe the marvellous panorama, which is generally reproduced in the form of a classical Chinese landscape painting. The tourists depicted in the paintings linger in front of the landscape painting idealised in the traditional way as if awestruck by the sublime quality of Chinese culture; by contrast, the viewer outside of the painting perceives a mass of humanity seeking cultural confirmation and legitimacy by nostalgically turning to the embodiment of a splendid past. The question of who we are and how we handle our collective past is one of the basic components of Huang Min's thought and artistic practice.

HUANG HE (*1977, China) | Huang He's preferred medium is oil painting. In his paintings he works with gradual variations of the colour black. The images of his *Faces* series, for example, show black and white figures wrapped in hoods, reminiscent of depictions of Baphomet; portraits with half-concealed faces or melodramatic images of the heads of screeching apes, which all appear to have been splashed with a white liquid. It almost seems that he is illustrating different facets and depths of his own psyche in his paintings. But the works are more than pure Narcissist self-portrayal: they touch the viewer; indeed, they seize him and make him think about whatever constitutes his own identity – and how this relates to the identity of a work and its creator.

MURSHIDA ARZU ALPANA (*1961, Bangladesh) | Murshida Arzu Alpana's work is shaped by influences from Bangladesh and India, but also by her study of art and long years living in Berlin. Simultaneously delicate and intensely glowing colours give her drawings and paintings a decisive mix of melancholy and cheer that exercises a strange magic on the viewer. The images have no artificial quality, developing from sounds and scenes – often childhood memories of the Muslim environment in which Alpana grew up. Their lines create dynamism; the artist avoids aseptic conceptual decisions completely. Murshida Arzu Alpana works with an understanding of culture that does not feed on exclusion, but exploits the possibilities of intercultural combination and sounds out transcultural forms of communication and interaction.

JAN MUCHE (*1975, Germany) | Jan Muche makes use of a wide range of printed matter for his works. He downloads photos from the Internet, copies them, and integrates them into his canvases and works on paper. Here they are combined with fragments of text and writing in ink and acrylics. The dualities of text and image that evolve in this way – their messages intensified yet more by the iridescent background patterns and structures, but consciously inaccessible to the viewer ad hoc – always seem to conceal yet another new reality. Jan Muche uses his radical cutting and collage technique to completely upset our images of history, assembling more and more pieces of the mosaic into a new construct that perhaps could be described as the "memory of memory loss".