

New (Object) Order
Opening: 30.8.19 from 18:00
30.8.19 – 26.10.19

Christoph Hänsli
Eduardo Rubén
Francisco Sierra

What does a metal rod, vase and ventilation vent all have in common? These are some of the subject matters that are presented in Last Tango's upcoming exhibition with Christoph Hänsli (b. 1963, Zurich), Eduardo Rubén (b. 1958 in Havana, Cuba) and Francisco Sierra (b. 1977, Santiago, Chile). Last Tango breaks away from its usual pairing and invites a third artist into the mix. With older and newer works by the artists *New (Object) Order* features painting, works on paper and an installation.

Versed in the skills of hyperreal painting and drawing this threesome convincingly create visual illusions of reality or morphed realities. The works are put together in a delicate dance with clusters of mental associations in the hope that viewers engage in an 'intensity of looking' (Berger). Light-handedly arranged, the featured artworks will try to push a notion of awareness, perception and representation, with the aim of evoking associations related to ideas of confinement, the everyday, texture, perspectival space, the haunted, linearity, freedom and dystopia.

Our perception of the everyday is tinged with our ingrained way of looking at the world. We associate certain ideas, feelings, and narratives to objects and environments surrounding us. In *New (Object) Order* the artists subjectively take on the essence of common objects, isolating them from their usual context. Through this irrational isolation, unusual composition or scale perhaps a new kind of meaning comes into being. Codes are imaginably broken such as in the case of Hänsli: "Dedicating an elaborately executed portrait to a light switch can be seen as an act of rebellion against traditional principles of order and a superficial system of values."¹

It is painting that has affinities, to varying degrees, to Conceptual Art, Realism, Surrealism, Pop Art, and Abstraction. The term Surrealism however doesn't sit well with Sierra: "I don't especially like the term 'Surrealism': we are surrounded by supposedly surreal things – you just have to see them."²

A number of techniques are noticeable in the show, be it oil on canvas, acrylic airbrush or egg tempera painting. Cord binding is also visible in Christoph Hänsli's 2017 *32 Fennel Salami*, a 48-part sculpture consisting of minutely hand-crafted salami tied with rope. This work is being exhibited for the first time.

The chosen subjects of the artists have often been of the obscure kind: portraits of screws collected on the street (Hänsli), corrugated rods (Rubén), a television (Hänsli), textured patterns (Hänsli and Rubén), clay sculptures (Sierra), balloons (Sierra), sausage (Hänsli and Sierra), vacuum cleaners (Sierra and Hänsli). At times the singular objects stand like monosyllables starkly alone with little animated life surrounding them or even curiously levitating in mid-air.

In Rubén's *Windows* series (1987) we are confronted with a pixelated void with eerie humanless arid landscapes that conjure contrasts between the artificial and the natural world. It is set in a first-person perspective, one that is reminiscent of low-fi gaming computer aesthetics. Material surfaces of the industrial kind are portrayed such as steel rods with its allure of coldness or systems akin to electronic boards. Another thread of his practice has an affinity to kinetic art with slight plays of optics. In his architectural compositions we encounter nonsensical ladders, corridors and staircases as potent dream signifiers of a seemingly lonely journey. With dramatic light and shadow there is a metaphysicality similar to that of de Chirico or Picabia.

In the exhibition we also come across domestic objects gathered in groupings. One such examples is Hänsli's *The Congress* (1999) with five standing vacuum cleaners: solemn dust collectors of our profane life. (Seen with today's eyes these outdated models are they themselves likely gathering dust.) An art historical reference comes to mind: Jeff Koons and his ready-mades from his 1981 series *The New*. The anthropomorphous appears throughout the show be it in the faux-innocence of the hoovers, or the sly human eye popping out in Sierra's painting of a teapot.

Overlooked objects finally get their moment in the limelight. As much as a portraitist tries to capture the character and individuality of a sitter we come to experience a serious rendering: a profiling of the "banal". This said, in the case of Sierra more classical motifs have also been painted such as vases and tea pots. They are objects that we might feel indifferent to, but as they become center-stage we are encouraged to have a ponder about them and capture their thereness. In the words of Hänslī, we get to see how "something gains in importance and existence if, or because, one pays attention to it."³

Exhibited are various of Sierra's paintings based on clay sculptures with gestural marks and traces of hand smudges. The contrast is wonderfully stark: roughly moulded forms calculatedly and elaborately made visible through painting. A feat in the artistry of the hand.

In 1996 John Berger wrote a text for a book featuring Christoph Hänslī's paintings. Published by Memory/Cage Editions, he beautifully describes Hänslī's paintings of bedrooms with unseen hotel guests and 70s wallpaper: "Your bedrooms are equally full of looking... Intense looking so that the whole body goes still. Yet of a different nature, because in your painting the looking is solitary and you the painter are alone making wallpaper, lamp, bedcover and pillows unforgettable. To be unforgettable implies a drama and here is the first mystery, for, in your paintings, which are unforgettable, there is no apparent drama. Or rather their drama, which is present in every square centimeter is an invisible one."⁴

Sometimes on the fringe of being cryptic, the work of Hänslī and Sierra share a subtle wit. The wit lies in the exaggerative gesture, be it a choice to monumentalize an inanimate object or to repeat a motif again and again which hinges for some on the absurd. As with Renaissance painters there seems to be a fascination with riddles, and the bizarre. For Hänslī it is also an attitude, to be non-sequential and to pick up on certain motifs and ideas again and again: "There is no early work, no late work: there is no higher development in art. Instead, it's always about loops, recourses, anticipations, and cross-references."⁵ It is of note that their practice at large also doesn't solely relate to one specific style: Sierra with his expressive and simple gouache paintings and Hänslī whose earlier works are of a more painterly style.

With titles such as *Escape* and *Abandonment* Rubén's work might at times point to the political climate of Cuba at the time wherein there were reoccurring false hopes and economic instabilities due to the stresses of the economic embargo from the U.S.⁶ The isolated and out of place sites could on the one hand be perceived as menacing, a foreshadowing of a hopeless future. Yet on the other hand, the deep blue waters or skies could flip the ambivalence to another mood, one of calm and peace.

This will mark the first exhibition of Eduardo Rubén in Switzerland with works from as early as 1985 and as late as 2014. Christoph Hänslī's work in the show span from 1995 to 2017 with most of the works having never been shown before. Sierra will be exhibiting mostly a new body of work (2015-2019).

The practice of the trio embodies an uncanniness and absurdity as in the following bar joke: "A priest, a minister, and a rabbi walk into a bar. The bartender looks at them and says, 'What is this, a joke?'"

Through the seduction of painting can the semantics of objects be thought of differently? Magritte's epic title *Treachery of Images* (1929) comes to mind, but here what surfaces is not related to the gap between language and meaning, but rather one that relates to subjectivity, context and culture.

For press inquiries please contact Linda Jensen at lindajensen@lasttango.info

1 p. 12 Citation of Juerg Judin and Pay Matthis Karstens in Christoph Hänslī: Corpus Haenslianum. Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2018.

2 p. 64 Quote by the artist in Francisco Sierra. Vienna: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 2013.

3 p. 11 Quote by the artist in Christoph Hänslī: Corpus Haenslianum. (ibid.)

4 p. 26 Citation of John Berger in Christoph Hänslī: Corpus Haenslianum. (ibid.)

5 p. 11 Quote by the artist in Christoph Hänslī: Corpus Haenslianum. (ibid.)

6 Wikipedia notes: "By the 1980s, Cuba's economy was again in trouble, following a decline in the market price of sugar and 1979's decimated harvest. Desperate for money, Cuba's government secretly sold off paintings from national collections and illicitly traded for U.S. electronic goods through Panama. Increasing numbers of Cubans fled to Florida, who were labelled "scum" by Castro. In one incident, 10,000 Cubans stormed the Peruvian Embassy requesting asylum, and so the U.S. agreed that it would accept 3,500 refugees... Hundreds of boats arrived from the U.S., leading to a mass exodus of 120,000; Castro's government took advantage of the situation by loading criminals and the mentally ill onto the boats destined for Florida." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuba_under_Fidel_Castro Accessed July 24, 2019