

## **Postmodern Chamber of Wonders**

Stéphane Belzère, Klaus Münch, and Simon Raab: The Albert Baumgarten Gallery in Freiburg presents three artists.

These images have as little in common with the trashy crash scenarios of a Dirk Skreber as they do with the pop-art crushed car parts of John Chamberlain — even if their surfaces look like crumpled car metal sheet. Simon Raab paints on light metal, which he deforms using a special process and then pads out with synthetic material. His images thus turn into color reliefs with idiosyncratic textures.

### **Goethe and Pop Art**

The three artists that Albert Baumgarten has brought together in his gallery space with his own sense for quality do, however, have one thing in common: each of them has left the land of his birth. The American Simon Raab came (as the son of a resistance fighter) into the world in Toulon, the western Swiss Stéphane Belzère has his studio in Paris, and the Freiburg born Klaus Münch has lived in Turin for more than two decades.

Here, however, the common ground ends, as long as one overlooks the fact that their theme is the dissolving of the traditional border between painting, object, relief and sculpture, and that potential for confusion of each of them should not be underestimated. Thus, Simon Raab selected the poet Goethe, the prince among poets and legendary old man, a strange wave and a head only recognizable as a color scheme as a motif, whereby he encases even the frame of the latter with crinkled metal that looks as if it has been fused. These curious works, whose elective affinity to Pop Art cannot be denied, oscillate between abstraction and representationalism, image and sculpture, and keep viewers at something of a distance.

Viewers of Werner Münch's transparent wall objects, in contrast, bend over them questioningly — in order to make out their own image behind the colored Plexiglas membrane. Münch's organoid wall objects are applied to mirrors so that the arched over space seems to be distended. The artist printed microscopic photographs on the Plexiglas domes: scenes from microbiology, which only increase the impression of unfamiliarity. Programmatically, he moves in virtually alchemistic spheres, whereby he understands his three-dimensional works as physical-social experiments. Finally, the canning jars of Stéphane Belzère. His nearly naturalistic paintings seems to be concerned with designs for experiments. Viscera floating in canning jars are lined up tidily on wooden shelves. At first glance, these mostly indefinable entrails bring to mind past biology lesson, medical displays or dusty museums, or perhaps also Damian Hurst's lucrative installations. The meaning and purpose of the collection, which touches on the disgusting, however, remains closed to us. Will new life hatch at some time from these remnants? Are these grotesque specimens still usable or only objects to look at and triggers of a vague feeling of vanity?

In reality, not far away is the thought of a pre-modern cabinet of curiosities, of those baroque, mostly feudal chambers of wonders in which the knowledge of the world was brought together in the smallest of spaces. Early forms of the museum. Only here, far more puzzles than answers remain. And — in any case — three interesting positions. Stefan Tolksdorf

— Galerie Baumgarten, Kartäuserstr. 32, Freiburg

— Until July 17, Tues. to Fri. 3–7pm, Wed., Thurs. also 10–12am; Sat. 11am–3pm