

Snapshots across time

Galerie Rieder celebrates its thirtieth anniversary with the tableaux by Simon Raab

By Sabine Reithmaier

Munich – One needs stamina, lots of patience and the willingness to break loose from the usual constraints every now and again. Those, according to Edith Rieder, are the most important characteristics of a gallery owner. “And of course one needs to know one’s own mind.” She should know, after all, she has run a gallery successfully for the last 30 years. The underlying themes that run through its history are the works of classical modernity. On the occasion of the gallery’s 30th birthday, Edith Rieder is once again “breaking loose” and is showing unusual works by Simon Raab, an American artist who moves between painting and sculpture.

Raab builds on the tradition of the specifically American Pop Art, but he is also inspired unmistakably by Monet and Van Gogh. However, it is not so much the subjects that arouse such interest in his works, but rather the unusual technique, which allows him to cast a very special glance at the history of art. Raab paints aluminium and steel sheets with acrylic paints. To ensure that the individual layers do not bleed, he separates them with clear varnish. There is nothing unusual in that. But then he dents, crumples, bends, buckles, and folds the sheets, in part with his bare hands, in part with a jackhammer, allowing reliefs to emerge, the colours of which alter constantly, depending on the fall of light and the position of the viewer. By these means Raab creates a fragmented world. It is up to each individual to define the contexts, a form of art that is very suited to modern everyday life.

Raab also portrays Goethe, Newton, and Michelangelo and adopts the stars of omnipresent popular culture. Whoever comes too close to the heads only sees contours and valleys, no specific picture, because the light breaks, mirrored and sparkling, on the multicoloured, faceted surfaces. It is only from a distance that the lines join each other and create briefly a pleasant, familiar image, and sometimes also a bizarre, distorted picture: snapshots that remain always the result of coincidental, fleeting encounters and could just as easily disappear. As in a kaleidoscope, much can be seen simultaneously, just as if one were to look through the surface of rippling water. Parleau (through water) is what Raab calls his technique, which he developed over the course of the last five years.

He illustrates the transitions between the abstract and the figurative.

The physicist and mechanical engineer came to art only at a late stage. He first proved himself as an inventor, founded the company Faro Technologies in 1982, which developed laser-supported precision instruments, and applied for 70 patents for his inventions. When he eventually left the company, he turned his inventive talents to art. He finds the shallow calm of static picture frustrating, because he misses the glow of energy. He once wrote: “I’m not interested in the abstract or the figurative, but rather in the transitions and confusions between both.”

In contrast, his gallerist Edith Rieder usually prefers abstract, objectless art. That was the case in June 1981, when the passionate art collector opened the “Haus unter den Kastanien” (the house beneath the horse chestnut trees) in Gauting. It was not only her first gallery, but the first ever gallery to be located in Gauting. The first artist she exhibited was Erich Keller, a painter and graphic artist born in Constance. Joachim Kaiser, who held the opening speech, was astonished by the courage it took to open a new gallery at that time. After three years, Rieder took the plunge and decided to move into the city: the temptation was simply too great, as she had been offered a space in Maximilianstrasse.

She opened in October 1984 with Fritz Winter, and exhibitions of works by Corinth, Feininger, Heckel, Jawlensky, Kirchner, and Nolde were to follow, not to mention – importantly – repeated showings of the Bauhaus artists, whose transformation from a more expressionist-oriented form to an increasingly stronger constructive style is greatly admired by Edith Rieder. In 1987 she showed for the first time the abstract black paintings by Pierre Soulages. In the mid-Eighties the Frenchman was still pretty much unknown, at least in Munich. One of the few people who already knew and admired him and collected his work was the gallery owner Otto Stangl. At the opening he congratulated the “Rieder” for her courage and prophesied that it was too soon to be showing Soulages in Munich. And indeed, nobody bought a single picture, Edith Rieder recalls. What a mistake that was, considering that it is now almost impossible to get one’s hands on anything by the almost 92 year old on the art market, and the rare items that are put up for sale cost utopian amounts.

Indeed the movement of prices is a topic in itself – crazy. Edith Rieder sighs a little and remembers the beautiful Kandinskys that she still had in the 1980s. Those days are gone. Now she no longer restricts herself to classical modernity, but increasingly takes on younger contemporaries such as Hanneke Beaumont, Wolfgang G. Bühler, Nan Goldin, and Peter Krawagna, and looks after the graduates of the Academy. It often takes a long time before the first piece by an artist finds a buyer. Sometimes a customer’s interest is only aroused in the second or third exhibition, says Rieder. But if she has learned thing in the last 30 years, it is patience.

Simon Raab, Parleau, until 3 December, Tuesday – Friday 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. and 2 – 6 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Galerie Rieder, Maximilianstrasse 22