

The Creative Destroyer

For the gallery's 30-year anniversary Edith Rieder presents for the first time in Munich a solo exhibition of French artist Simon Raab.

By Rüdiger Heise

Twisted metal certainly occurs most frequently in road traffic. Engineers refer to it as cold deformation. If the deformation is deliberately applied to the material, usually steel or aluminium sheet metal, in engineers' jargon this is called cold forming. Simon Raab, who started his career as a physicist and mechanical engineer, uses cold forming to create works of art. Working from photos he paints steel and aluminium sheets in brilliant acrylic colours. His choice of subjects includes everyday objects and events in real life as well as portraits of historical personalities he admires in politics, science and the arts. So far, so good. But here's what happens next. The artist who lives in Santa Barbara CA today uses brute manual force as well as a jackhammer to begin reshaping the sheet metal. The flat surface of the painted metal starts to bulge as a result. Wrinkles, creases and dents appear. The image surface is increasingly transformed into a three-dimensional figure, a multi-coloured, dazzling bas-relief. This process of disturbed perception gives the series of works its title *Parleau* ("par l'eau" is French for "through water"), because the panels appear to the eye to be lying in moving water or the viewer associates their surface with reflections of light on water's surface. With the folds and dents an often broken surface is created that almost obeys the rules of chaos, on which light is refracted differently at each moment. For the viewer there is an impression of unpredictable vitality and versatility. With acts of destruction and violence the artist here enables new, unusual perceptions. He therefore resembles the type of entrepreneur so influentially described by the Austrian-American economist Joseph Alois Schumpeter. The principle of creative destruction serves in both areas to deal with the impositions of the present. At the same time, it becomes quite clear when exploring Simon Raab's art that there is no contradiction between representation and abstraction. What appear to be contradictions are only varying scales of perception. Viewed at close range, a riot of colour looks like an abstract image but as you move away from it, it is then certainly recognisable as part of a metal sculpture. Simon Raab's work is included in the gallery's programme, which has presented artistic representatives of classical modernism since it was founded in 1981, especially artists of the Bauhaus and the Informel movement. With Eduardo Chillida, Francisco Ferreras and Antoni Tàpies, Edith Rieder has repeatedly taken up the cause of Spanish art since 1945. And since 1987 she has regularly exhibited works in Munich by Pierre Soulages, the 91-year-old doyen of French painting. In addition to these well-known figures, however, there is sufficient space for representatives of current contemporary painting, sculpture and photography – new discoveries such as the physicist, engineer and visual artist Simon Raab.