

Josef Kern

1953 born in Schiefer (Stmk.)

1972–79 Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien (Prof. Hollegha)

lives and works in Vienna

Josef Kern developed an unambiguous artistic stance early on. *Haufen* (pile) of 1979 may serve as a representative example. The content of his work is based on the artist's personal perception of his immediate surroundings. Kern chooses a quiet, unspectacular motif - a pile of wood, stones and rubble at a brook near his home in Styria. In a close-up view, the painter describes details, such as bits of wood, rock formations, drainage pipes made of brick (see ill. p. 25). This strong focus results in a pattern-like conception of his paintings, of similar objects. There is no horizon, Kern reduces the three-dimensional effect of what he perceives to the surface - the painting shows tendencies of an abstract all-over composition. Even if, in the following years, i.e. in the early 1980s, the artist emphasises the aspect of realism in his paintings, the exploration of detail is very obvious. Nevertheless, Kern's quality as a painter is revealed in the colourist diversity which the artist gives to a piece of wood or stone. This distinguishes Josef Kern from fellow artists such as Anzinger, Mosbacher and Schmalix, who were much wilder at the time. During the 80s, they were all, however, going to turn away from expressive painting and turn to a self-assured, calmer artistic style. At the time, there was a great demand for paintings on the art market, which resulted in painters rushing to produce works quickly, and they were still wet when offered to potential buyers - critical reflection took second place to a fresh and more conflict-free abandon. From his beginnings as an artist, Josef Kern, always a slow, more introverted painter, also professed scepticism vis-à-vis the enormous flood of paintings produced by New Painting. Despite the concentration and calm he devotes to the art of painting, his motifs are anything but contemplative or even lyrical. At the centre of his work is the wish to translate the pure sensuality of the human body, its sexual nature, into a condensed painting: skin incarnate, which sometimes reveals a little of what lies beneath, the flesh. In this respect, Lucian Freud's nudes are related to Kern's strategy. Kern strives to achieve nuanced colourist, surface textures and artistic depth.

The artist takes a clear orientation from his model; his main source for motifs are his immediate personal surroundings - first and foremost his girlfriend. He portrayed himself with a painter's palette, fellow artists, collectors, friends from the world of art, but always related to the nature of painting. The painting and the subject are mutual prerequisites.

The main characteristics of his paintings are their opulent yet delicate abundance, the allure of gentle curves and glimpses of intimate spheres. The physically organic nature of oil paint helps the artist give his subjects a heightened note of sensuality. Kern loves to augment and enhance, taking what is abundant to the limits of overabundance. He builds wooden frames, tailor-made for the motif, which usually mimic the organically rounded shapes of the painting structure. The pompous frames almost crowd in on the canvas and the subject depicted. They compact the subject and at the same time serve as a kind of peephole for male or female voyeurs, as the case may be. In the little opening lies hidden the cleavage of a sparsely dressed lady, her breast symmetrically placed on the canvas (see ill. p. 69). The viewer's eye is fixed on "the one thing"; the potential appearance of the person, especially her face, is of secondary importance for the viewer in this case.

Apart from the human figure, Josef Kern's preferred motives are flowers and still-lives. His studio serves as the source for his work. He arranges personal items next to things that just happen to be there into complex compositions - clearly distanced from the conventional iconology of still-life. Instead of fruit bowl, skull and potted plant, he paints, for instance, an old fencing mask together with a hatchet (see ill. p. 73). The rough wooden floor of the gallery gives the painting a somewhat rustic, earthy aura - and the composition also communicates a slightly ironic note. Figuration and the ambition of mimesis are largely preserved, and yet every zone of Kern's paintings testifies to the condensed character of his artistic output. Most of them smaller formats, his still-lives convey a delicately culinary note - a redfish dressed on a plate - but they are representative of a consistent compositional purpose and a physically artistic sensuality.

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Einzelausstellungen (Auswahl)

1978 Galerie Ariadne, Wien
1981 Galerie Maier, Innsbruck
1983 Galerie H.S. Steinek, Wien, Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Graz
1984 Neue Galerie, Graz
1985 Galerie Richard Jakopic, Ljubljana, Galleria Torbandena, Triest, Treviso
1986 Galerie Bleich-Rossi, Graz
1988 Galleria Torbandena, Triest
1990 Galerie Theuretzbacher, Wien
1991 BAWAG-Foundation, Wien, Neue Galerie Studio, Graz
1994 Rupertinum, Salzburg, Galerie Altnöder, Salzburg
1996 Galerie I&AC, Graz, Galerie Menotti, Baden/Wien
1997 Kunstforum, Hallein
1998 Galerie Altnöder, Salzburg
2000 Portfolio Kunst AG, Wien
2001 Black Dragon Society, Salzburg
2002 Schloss Ulmerfeld b. Amstetten, Galerie Schafschetzy, Graz
2003 Galerie Jünger, Baden b. Wien, Galerie Altnöder, Salzburg
2004 Galerie Schafschetzy, Graz, Kunsthandel Gölles, Fürstenfeld

Gruppenausstellungen (Auswahl)

1978 Galerie Ariadne, Wien
1980 Galerie Ariadne, Wien; Neue Galerie, Graz
1981 Neue Galerie, Graz; Neue Galerie und Künstlerhaus, Graz
1982 Rheinisches Landesmuseum, Bonn; Museum des 20. Jahrhunderts, Wien
1983 Galleria Torbandena, Triest
1984 Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck
1985 Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles; Zagreb, Ljubljana, Belgrad; Neue Galerie, Graz;
Kunsthalle, Budapest 1988 Palais Thurn und Taxis, Bregenz; Musée de Toulon
1990 Musée d` Art Contemporain, Lyon
1992 Salford Museum and Art Gallery, Manchester; Galerie Krinzinger, Wien
1994 Rupertinum, Salzburg
1998 NÖ Dokumentationszentrum für moderne Kunst, St. Pölten
1999 Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal, Museion – Museum moderner Kunst, Bozen, Rupertinum,
Salzburg, NÖ Dokumentationszentrum für moderne Kunst, St. Pölten
2000 Galerie Altnöder, Salzburg Galerie Schafschetzy, Graz; Galerie Judith Walker, Schloss
Ebenau Schloss Ulmerfeld b. Amstetten, Schloss St. Peter/Au, Galerie Museum auf Abruf,
Galerie Jünger, Baden b. Wien,
2001 Galerie Museum auf Abruf, Città di Lissone,
2002 Galerie Altnöder, Salzburg, Galerie Lang, Wien, Galleria d` Arte Moderna, Bologna (I)
2003 Galerie CC, Graz, Galerie Lang, Wien
2004 Sammlung Essl, Klosterneuburg