

Reto Boller & Markus Weggenmann

Opening Saturday, October 13, 4 – 6 pm

13 October – 10 November 2018



Reto Boller, (*Einmal täglich*), 2018, wood, bandage, adhesive film, 110 x 57 x 69 cm
Photo: Erwin Auf der Maur, Zürich

Contemporary Male Art:

Reto Boller & Markus Weggenmann in Dialogue

Invar-Torre Hollaus

What is the purpose of a “flat monument” hung on the wall, on which an elongated, bust-like, amorphous shape in black paint contrasts schematically with its background? And what should we make of the directions “Once a day” in regard to a crudely made, seemingly uncomfortable holder attached to the wall and footprint markings in red adhesive film on the floor? And what is supposed to be typically “male” about this art, which lacks the virile gestures associated with Jackson Pollock or Jeff Koons? Or does the sober yet provocative exhibition title simply point to the fact that it is an exhibition by two male artists? The two Swiss artists Reto Boller (1966, Zürich) and Markus Weggenmann (1953, Singen/Hohentwiel) clearly take a position. Their works use very different means and materials to create a strong spatial, physical, sometimes unwieldy presence, and thus challenge the viewer far beyond a purely aesthetic level of perception.

At first glance, this juxtaposition might seem surprising, since both artists have been consistently pursuing independent developments in their work for years, in which they seek new artistic means of expression in a direct engagement with art history as well as with their everyday environment. Both share a strong interest in painting and a decisive use of often bold colors. While Weggenmann at least formally works within traditional panel painting, Boller uses a wide range of industrially manufactured materials and objects from other contexts as well as painterly interventions. Both artists reconsider the traditional

medium of painting by using bold distemper or acrylic paints or colored adhesive films as well as in some cases industrially manufactured substrates, which brings these works into an immediate, contemporary context. Reto Boller's and Markus Weggenmann's works show themselves to be abstracted, artificial objects of an associatively metaphorical, symbolic imagery; figurative aspects always remain a central factor in the work of both artists. Physical, organic aspects can be found both in Markus Weggenmann's new paintings—which at times recall a human figure (LW70, LW75) or a skull (LW52)—as well as in Reto Boller's sculptural objects and installations, some of which fill an entire wall or room with colored, reflective adhesive film that diffusely reflects the space and the viewer (B-18.1 *Amsterdam (bereitgestellt)*; O-17.1 (*Machine Head*); B-18.2 (*Landschaft*). In contrast to earlier years, instead of aluminum panels and flatly applied glossy paints, Markus Weggenmann now uses cotton and boldly colored distempers, which penetrate deeply into the fabric, making the colors no longer glossy, but warmer and more haptic.



Markus Weggenmann, *Flaches Denkmal Nr1*, 2017
high load distemper on cotton, 320 x 200 cm

For the first time, Galerie Onrust is presenting a joint exhibition with Reto Boller and Markus Weggenmann, both of whom have exhibited in Amsterdam several times before: Boller most recently in 2010 (at *Vous Etes Ici*) and Weggenmann in 2013 (at Galerie Onrust). With recent works, both artists offer insight into their current oeuvre and their understanding of art.

Interview*

INVAR-TORRE HOLLAUS (ITH): Double exhibitions are popular at the moment, especially in the case of modernism. You have been represented by Galerie Mark Müller in Zurich for many years, so you know each other personally as well as each other's work. Still, it's not an obvious choice to show your works together, which have a strong, individual presence of their own. What was your biggest challenge in realizing this exhibition project?

RETO BOLLER (RB): The juxtaposition of in some cases large-scale works while not overloading the exhibition.

MARKUS WEGGENMANN (MW): I've followed Reto's work with great interest for decades. We've also been able to exhibit together in various group exhibitions. In recent years, the powerful, masculine works astonished and sometimes scared me. They encouraged me to create a similarly powerful physical presence with the traditional means of painting, canvas, and color.

ITH: Color is a key component in your work. You both regularly make use of industrially manufactured paints, substrates, or techniques of applying paint. Painting in the traditional sense of a painterly gesture or signature doesn't really play a role in your work. How would you define yourselves as painters, or what do you see as the greatest challenge in positioning oneself in contemporary art as a painter who not only paints but continues to push forward painting as such?

RB: I've never sought a clear definition of my work. In recent years, I've managed to bring my work closer to an everyday reality. My personal challenge is to locate the trivial and, when I use it, to do so in a credible manner.

MW: I've always applied paint flatly; I've never wanted an internal texture, just pure and clear forms in color. Maximum intensity is more important than subtlety. I never considered how and where I can position myself in today's art, but how I can push my painting forward. How can I create something new for myself and learn from what I've painted? And my best pictures are still ahead of me!

ITH: You both work in panel painting but also with various other media, which result in large-scale works and installations. How do your three-dimensional works affect your understanding of space and pictures when you return to painting?

RB: The painted illusion of space as a result is barely present in my panel paintings.

MW: I think about the question: Is it possible to achieve a powerful, physical counterpart with painting, a counterpart like a stone sculpture, a monument, a stela, a menhir? An image as a physical confrontation? For several months now I've been working on a series of "flat sculptures" and "flat monuments"—painted sculptural motifs on canvas or cotton. In order to give the paint more body, I use pure pigments that are only weakly bound. "Flat sculptures, flat monuments" also include works in memory of my father, grandfather, great-grandfather—they were all stonemasons and stone sculptors; these are also reminiscences.

ITH: The titles also seem to be a central aspect in both of your works. Many of your works are simply numbered. In addition, there are also individual works or series of works with strongly associative or metaphorical titles, even if these—as in the case of Reto's work—are often only in parentheses. Do you want to point the viewer down a particular path with these decisive titles?

RB: Yes. A well-chosen title broadens one's understanding of or approach to a work. It sometimes also works as sand in the gears.

MW: I use titles only for series.

ITH: Final question: Artists usually read extensively (but rarely texts on art theory). What book is currently on your table, and what aspect of the author or the book is of particular interest for your own understanding of art?

RB: *Frank* by Richard Ford. His characters are often busy with mundane acts and rituals of everyday life; their thoughts are sometimes with the task at hand, and sometimes—devotedly—not with the task at hand.

MW: I'm an enthusiastic reader of the books of Corinna Bille (1912–1979), a French-speaking Swiss woman whose books have only recently been translated into German. They are short stories and novels full of intensity, passion, and sensual physicality, whether she is describing an alpine flower or human relationships.

* The interview was conducted with both artists by e-mail between 20 and 27 September 2018.

Galerie Onrust

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