

Text for press release

Christian Jankowski

“Was ich noch zu erledigen habe“

3 June – 30 July 2010

Opening times:

Tuesday to Friday 14h00 – 18h00

and by prior arrangement

Grieder Contemporary is, for the first time ever in Switzerland, showing a large selection of works by Christian Jankowski, arguably the most important German video artist to emerge from the younger generation.

"I am not a director – rather, I facilitate situations. I often work with people whose work involves them with the production of images – people, in other words, who look at the world from completely different perspectives and who are driven by a variety of motives. What really interests me is the mass media in its different forms. It gives my performances additional contexts of meaning: a porn camera team, or a Hollywood director, or the second-best wedding photographer – they all add an extra dimension to my work," says Christian Jankowski, describing his *modus operandi* in a conversation with Dan Graham. In his videos and performances, Jankowski allows the codes and structures of all kinds of worlds to collide; the outcomes are as entertaining as they are illuminating. In *Die Jagd* [The Hunt], one of his earliest videos, which he recorded in the style of an amateur film, Jankowski can be seen feeding himself for an entire week on items he shot with a bow and arrow in a supermarket: armed with this archaic weaponry – yet, like a well-behaved shopper, pushing the shopping trolley in front of him – he shoots chicken, margarine, toilet paper and other daily necessities. We see the expressionless checkout lady scanning the items with the arrows still sticking out of them. Jankowski's manner of operating – experimenting with an open outcome bordering on the absurd – was thus already evident in this early work .

Jankowski likes to create situations where the mass media and the world of art meet. For his video *Kochstudio* [Culinary Studio], Jankowski had a facsimile of his kitchen erected in the Klosterfelde Gallery, where he invited TV personality and celebrity chef Alfred Biolek to join him in cooking and chatting about art and television in front of the camera. The recordings were later shown on monitors in the pretend kitchen. Jankowski and Biolek can be seen talking about the opportunities offered by art videos and television and the similarities and differences between their two lines of work. In the course of the conversation, Jankowski described his stance as an artist: "I think I to try create a framework, to come up with alternative perspectives on something that's already around – to make people look at it differently. For me, it's not so much about expressing my own opinion. Perhaps my opinion comes across anyway – through the way I do something or the fact that I do something in a particular way without propagandising or promoting it." This kind of arm's-length spectating is also the reason why Jankowski never goes down the familiar path of know-it-all, conventional institutional criticism, but manages to remain hovering elegantly between criticism and affirmation.

The Perfect Gallery, which provides the core of the exhibition at Grieder Contemporary, is also based on the idea of translating a television format into the art world. In the BBC programme *House Invaders*, presenter Gordon Whistance teams up with experts to freshen up down-in-the-mouth flats and houses. Jankowski invited Whistance, who is relatively unfamiliar with art, to demonstrate his idea of a perfect exhibition space using the Pump House Gallery in London as an example. In the video, Whistance has conversations with curators and gallery owners, visits and comments on various

exhibition venues, and ends up remodelling the Pump House Gallery – revealing himself to be a new and unexpected critic of the "white cube" approach.

Alongside The Perfect Gallery, the exhibition at Grieder Contemporary will be featuring others of Jankowski's video works, including the aforementioned Die Jagd, as well as the strip-pokeresque Strip the Auctioneer, in which a Christie's auctioneer auctions off the clothes he is standing in, item-by-item, to raise funds for the De Appel cultural centre. Jankowski then displayed the auctioned clothes in show cases in a move designed to give them added cachet and turn them into objets d'art – a typically ironic subversion by the artist that casts a spotlight on the value-creating mechanisms of the art market.

A good example of Jankowski's collaboration with image producers working outside the art world is his Living Sculptures. Here, Jankowski had pantomime artists that he had come across in the Ramblas in Barcelona cast as (confusingly) as real bronze statues – these included a Roman legionary, a revolutionary Che Guevara and even Salvador Dali's anthropomorphic woman with drawers.

Mundane image production in an urban setting is also the theme of a series of photographs featured in the Grieder Contemporary exhibition. Jankowski, for instance, is currently in receipt of a stipend from the Villa Massimo in Rome, for which he is going round the streets of the city photographing elderly women who like to project an aura of youthful sex appeal through their fashion sense or demeanour.

Emblematic of the ambiguous nature of Jankowski's oeuvre is a neon sign lighting up the facade of Grieder Contemporary: culled from the series Was ich noch zu erledigen habe [What I still need to do], it asks Warum bin ich nicht in einer Biennale? [Why am I not at a biennale?] It is worth noting that Christian Jankowski was at the 1999 Venice Biennale with a video work, in which five fortune-tellers all foretold the successful outcome of his participation. A self-fulfilling prophecy, in that the work met with universal acclaim and brought Jankowski his decisive international breakthrough.

Christian Jankowski (*1968 in Göttingen, Germany) lives and works in Berlin. He is currently in receipt of a stipend from the German Academy in Rome at the Villa Massimo. His solo exhibition The Perfect Gallery at London's Pump House Gallery runs until 6 June 2010. Work of his is also on show at this year's Sydney Biennale, which runs until 1 August. Jankowski will also be a participant at the Taipei Biennale 2010.

(Text by Martin Jaeggi)