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it happens in austria

francesca pagliuca



In German, the difference between the words "dream" (traum) and "trauma" (trauma) is marked only by a simple vowel. A small variant, which seems to indicate that the dreamlike state, driven as it is by irrational impulses, is close to that of trauma, likewise characterized by inner disruption. It is not surprising that dreams and psychological disturbance, both interpreted as altered states of conscience, have traditionally represented an especially favorable way to escape from reality and the everyday for artists, as well as a way to turn conventional behaviors upside down, letting submerged emotions surface. *Traum & Trauma / Dream & Trauma. Works from the Dakis Joannou Collection*—a thematic exhibition showing works from the private collection of Greek tycoon Dakis Joannou, hosted at MUMOK and the Kunsthalle in Vienna—finds an emblematic opening to its course in a work by Christopher Wool, which suggests how appearances can be

deceptive before plunging into the world of the irrational. *Steel Curtain* (1986) is indeed an enamel on steel, although, at first glance, it looks like some kind of action painting. The work hints at the concepts of revelation and passage, whilst calling into question the styles, materials, and creative codes of painting itself. Poka-Yio's installation, entitled *Self-Decapitated*—inviting the viewer to step across a semi-open gate, on whose edge stands an impaled mock head of the artist—gives voice also to the nightmare of the Greek civil war and its feuding between factions; Anna Gaskell's beautiful photographs or Nigel Cooke's refined paintings convey more rarefied emotions, "hanging" atmospheres, and are subtly disturbing. Employing recycled materials, both works by Nari Wardi (one hosted at MUMOK, the other at the Kunsthalle) can be read as a warning against the excesses of a consumer society—the accumulation of tattered



▲ Nari Ward *Hunger Cradle*, 1996, installation / installazione. Courtesy The Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens / Atene.

▲ Tim Noble / Sue Webster *He/She*, installation / installazione. Courtesy The Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens / Atene.

objects ends up shaping either monumental compositions (*Amazing Grace*) or intricate mazes through which one is invited to venture (*Hunger Cradle*). Robert Gober is represented by a series of sculptures which, as is customary with his works, hide disturbing elements within the apparently familiar. In Nathalie Djurberg's videos, figures modeled in plasticine bring a grotesque universe to life: in small acts of cruelty and untamable impulses, the human condition is revealed as fragile and vulnerable. After visiting the surreal, dark, and somber atmospheres of *Traum & Trauma / Dream & Trauma* (curated by Gerald Matt, Angela Stief, and Edelbert Köb), one can return to a more reassuring, rather, romantic environment at the Bawag Foundation, where *Romantic Conceptualism*, a show curated by Jörg Heiser and open until December 1, explores the romantic urge in conceptual art. That conceptual artists followed—although with a more systematic and rigorous approach—mystical, melancholic and deeply emotional trends was already a given since Sol LeWitt's 1976 statements.

However, it is always fascinating to track down creative moments where opposite forces (namely, rationality and romanticism) reconcile—it is almost like declaring that the supremacy of ideas and abstract concepts does not exclude emotion; on the contrary, it indicates a renewed sensitivity and a stronger awareness. This is the case with Bas Jan Ader and Felix Gonzalez-Torres's entire oeuvre, as well as with Henrik Hakansson's remit and Cerith Wyn Evans's contributions.

The process of accumulation carried out by Anna Oppermann in her "Ensembles" compositions is, meanwhile, conceptual but at the same time poetic and extremely alluring. By combining drawings, photographs, and a variety of objects, the German artist—to whom the Generali Foundation dedicates a large retrospective curated by Ute Vorkoeper—has developed a very personal language to recount the contradictions of our times, as well as her own private desires and anxieties.

A few steps from the Generali Foundation, namely in Karlsplatz, Vienna's young architects are the protagonists at Kunsthalle's