MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
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Press

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Turner, Michael. "Memories of Sculptor Martin Honert," *Vancouver Magazine*. 1 July 2013.

Conner, Shawn. "Vancouver Art Gallery Summer Exhibits Act as Symbolic Time Travel," *Vancouver Sun*. 28 June 2013.

Forbes, Alexander. "Martin Honert Goes on a Crusade for the Young of Body and Mind at the Hamburger Bahnhof," *ARTINFO*. 10 October 2012.

Potepan, Nina. "Martin Honter's 'Kinderkreuzzug' at Hamburger Bahnhof," *San Francisco Arts Quarterly.* October 2012

Boucher, Brian. "Martin Honert," *Art in America*. February 2008, pp. 141-142.

Harris, Jane. "Martin Honert," *Time Out New York.* 8-15 April 2004, p. 54.

Groys, Boris. "Mind's Eye View," *ArtForum*. February 1995, pp. 52-61.

Lebrero Stals, Jose. "Martin Honert: Out of the Deadpan," *Flash Art*. April 1993, p. 88.

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MEMORIES OF SCULPTOR MARTIN HONERT
July 1st, 2013

Consequence of the Vancouver Art Gallery's highly publicized, at times contentious, effort to relocate has been distraction from what it does so well: programming that mixes the work of local artists with populist blockbusters and Canadian debuts by international contemporary practitioners. While the recent Art Spiegelman retrospective combined the latter two categories (resulting in a bump of 20,000 extra visitors), Martin Honert's show, just opened, is merely the first museum exhibition in North America by an artist known for his infrequent output.

The Düsseldorf-based Honert, 60, is a maker of meticulously rendered "realistic" sculptures that are difficult to forget. Also known as a memory artist, he takes it as his mission to "explore things that may well have happened a long time ago but that continue to exist for me as an image." Those memories are neither vituperative nor sentimental but the product of a post-war West German childhood he describes as "just as dull and boring as anyone else's." Remembered from schoolbooks, drawings

Turner, Michael. "Memories of Sculptor Martin Honert," *Vancouver Magazine*. 1 July 2013.

by his own hand, and photographs taken by family members, these personal materials have for the past 30 years inspired works that play as much with scale as with viewers' ability to locate themselves in relation to his sculptural form.

The results are at times unnerving. In Riesen (2007), two unkempt men in jeans and hoodies stand in the middle of the gallery floor, as if taking a breather from a long trek. One, looking down, leans on a wooden staff; the other holds a knapsack, gazing up in the opposite direction. Over eight feet tall, these trekkers make for imposing figures, giants in contemporary garb. Are they mountain hikers, like those Honert might remember from a kindergarten adventure story? Yet from their cracked nails and smudged clothing they could just as easily be living rough on the streets of Vancouver, the staff less a walking stick than a binner's pole or a weapon of self-defence, their knapsacks filled with salvaged or stolen goods.

The medieval figures in Children's Crusade (1985-1987) are painted before rolling green hills on a wall-mounted canvas, as well as emerging from that canvas as life-size versions of the figurines one might paint and play with as a child. Like the giants in Riesen, the lead figure in Children's Crusade has come to a stop, as if to assess what lies ahead. This stop might well reflect the young Honert pausing to look up from his schoolbook to consider what it meant for 13th-century European children to march across the continent intent on ridding the Holy Land of Muslims, particularly in light of a more recent conflict that had the Nazis attempting to rid Europe of her Jews.

If Children's Crusade mixes wall work and sculpture, River Landscape (2006) is a work of sculpture set inside a wall. In this instance, a miniature three-dimensional re-creation of the lush Rhine River Valley. Here, a train exits a tunnel at five minute intervals, its second appearance deeper in the landscape. The difference between the first and second appearances is not only distance but scale, with the second, smaller train creating a "forced" perspective that, through exaggeration, allows a bucolic setting to enter the uncanny.

These touchstones-the uncanny, childhood, memory-are not new to the exhibition's co-curator, photo-based artist Jeff Wall, who has explored these themes in large-scale tableaux that appear to be as much sculpted as montaged "cinematographically" from numerous shots. One such picture, A Ventriloquist at a Birthday Party in October 1947 (1990), has prepubescent children seated around a "dummy" and its operator. While the scene brings to mind a potential memory-maker for Honert, Wall refers to this work as an "accident of reading," where what you think you remember from a book is simply your imagination. No accident here that Wall should see in Honert what he does so well himself.

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VNCOUVER ART GALLERY SUMMER EXHIBITS ACT AS AYMBOLIC TIME TRAVEL

June 28th, 2013

According to legend, in the 13th century 30,000 children marched towards the Holy Land to convert Muslims to Christianity.

However, the children never reached their destination; depending on accounts, they either drowned in shipwrecks or were sold into slavery.

Whether or not the Children's Crusade, as it's known, ever happened – and historians are skeptical – isn't the point of a piece by Martin Honert.

Instead, Honert's Children's Crusade, part of a new exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery, is about the power of remembered images.

Conner, Shawn. "Vancouver Art Gallery Summer Exhibits Act as Symbolic Time Travel," *Vancouver Sun*. 28 June 2013.

Photographs, memories and schoolbook illustrations are the major influences on the German artist, whose work is the subject of one of three new shows running at the VAG throughout the summer and into the fall. (Unfortunately the artist, who doesn't like to fly, won't be coming to Vancouver for the show, which is the first Canadian museum exhibition of his work.)

Also showing at the VAG are two exhibits with more homegrown origins. Portraits in Time showcases pieces from the gallery's video collection and features work by Vancouver artists Rodney Graham, Althea Thauberger, and Roy Arden, as well as Amsterdam-based Fiona Tan.

Allochthonous Window, meanwhile, is the result of Vancouver artist Gareth Moore's "dialogue" with Emily Carr. Moore figuratively followed in the footsteps of the B.C. painter, who travelled to remote locations for inspiration for the ceramics she produced for the tourist market.

Moore's travels took him to places such as India, South Korea and Sproat Lake on Vancouver Island, where stone has cultural significance. With artifacts from his travels, the installation artist has put together a room-size work that includes a stone footpath, grid patterns painted on walls with plant material such as blackberries, and a life-size representation of an explorer/artist, much like himself.

As curator Grant Arnold noted, the piece is "a journey where you arrive at the source."

It's important to Moore to break with traditional gallery conventions, Arnold says. Hence, information about the installation is found not on a plaque but on a wooden paddle that hangs from the wall.

The works in Portraits in Time, meanwhile, are united by the theme of straying from standard portraiture to present people in untraditional contexts. Graham's Halcion Sleep (1994) finds the artist under the influence of a sedative, while Thauberger's not afraid to die (2001) contrasts images of young women with a monologue about suicide and death.

Martin Honert is much more fanciful than that of its concurrent exhibits. By reaching into his childhood for inspiration, the artist has created some truly arresting pieces.

Riesen (Giants, 2007), a large-scale sculpture of two men, evokes a childhood sense of wonder and even dread, with adults depicted like (possibly malevolent) giants. The

polyester-and-resin sculpture Feuer (Fire) is based on an illustration that accompanied a dictionary definition of fire.

According to Kimberly Phillips, curatorial assistant to director Kathleen Bartells for the exhibit, the original image of the Children's Crusade came to Honert via (as though through a window) a chalkboard while a teacher discussed the apocryphal event. The facial expressions of the crusaders — both the ones painted on a backdrop and the two life-size statues leading the charge — come from the tin soldiers the artist had as a boy.

Another piece, Laterne (Lantern), is a cube just over three feet high (one metre). The cube is lit from inside and, in brilliant blues, depicts four different perspectives of a man, Honert, lying in a bed and watching TV. The screen shows images of Earth from space while the moon is visible through a window.

Though the man in the images of the 2000 piece is a self-portrait of the then-47-year-old Honert, Laterne too is about the past. The room may be modelled after his dorm room, and the images represent his memory of watching the moon landing.

"Honert and other German artists of his generation aren't interested in nostalgia," Phillips said. "They're more distant and less angst-ridden than artists of his previous generation."

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MARTIN HONERT GOES ON A CRUSADE...
OCTOBER 10th, 2012

At stake in Martin Honert's "Kinderkreuzzug" — on view at Berlin's Hamburgerbahnhofthrough April 7, 2013 — is not only a reclamation and lauding of childhood fantasies, pleasures, and memories, but also but also a documentation of a first generation of childhoods whose fantasies were molded in plastic and traveled at the speed of a jet engine. Escaping one's manifest, material reality was also a material shift into brittle polystyrenes whose hollow cling differed so profoundly from the wooden clunk of the past, but whose abundance let so many more fantasies enter the imagination and sandbox to break and be replaced by new ones.

The work after which the exhibition is named, made from 1985-87, just after the artist's graduation from the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf, sees two crusading knights with boyish features despite their adult size, followed by a hoard of peasants and fellow crusaders which become progressively flattened into a two-dimensional image on the wall. One could imagine a world of childhood possibility in which this pair guards against parental decrees. Yet, the still-visible seam left by the plastic's mold disrupts their otherwise meticulously painted surface, recalling their miniature imperfect

Forbes, Alexander. "Martin Honert Goes on a Crusade for the Young of Body and Mind at the Hamburger Bahnhof," *ARTINFO*. 10 October 2012.

forms in childhood use and their process of production in adult analyses.

Just behind this initial fantasy stands "Ein Szenisches Modell des Fliegenden Klassenzimmers" (1995) which earned Honert the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale of the same year. The work references the eponymous children's book and television program, which took the new worldly possibilities of the second half of the 20 century to the classroom, envisioning a fantasy in which students studying pyramids were transported instantaneously to the Egypt of the Pharaohs. It was oen of the first instances in which education became an experiential rather than dictatorial practice. In Honert's iteration, the figures are flattened, as if realizing what might be a childhood assumption that there really were people in that wooden television box, squeezed between two panes of glass.

These narratives are not Honert's. He is vastly more simplistic in his descriptions of the various impulses that led to each of the works on view's creation, which are compiled within a sub-catalogue for the exhibition distributed at its entrance. That Honert feels the compulsion to justify the origins of his works through language has more than a purely empirical consequence, however. On one level, the linguistic justification is a perhaps unintentionally a nod to the 20century modulation of the cogi-

Forbes, Alexander. "Martin Honert Goes on a Crusade for the Young of Body and Mind at the Hamburger Bahnhof," *ARTINFO*. 10 October 2012.

to, "I think, I speak, therefore I am," in which the subject's possession of language — the ability to formulate and communicate thoughts and memories seen through an empirical lens as electrical impulses and chemical reactions — predicating existence. For these sculpturally bound recollections to be Honert's he has to place them within constructs. It can be done neither by this critic, nor even a fictitious twin with identical experiences. Honert must give them consequence.

Alternatively, Honerts impulse to qualify could be viewed from a psychoanalytic angle; these texts fall neatly into the category of secondary revision. This is most accessibly applied to the early works on view at the Hamburgerbahnhof. For example, "Tisch mit Wackel-pudding, Roter Polsterstuhl (Table with Jell-O, Red Umholstered Chair)" (1983). According to the artist's text, the work attempts to come to terms with the time he spent in boarding school. The turn of phrase used, "coming to terms with," (in denen ich mich mit meiner Schulzeit in einem Internat in Ostwestfalen auseinandergesetzt hatte) suggests a certain level of trauma or feeling of alienation. However, the description of the work's glowing red polystyrene chair and standard issue laminate top kitchen table that shakes every so often with considerable racket to make the otherwise solid emerald Jell-O wiggle is almost exclusively technical. By this removal of emotional content to the level of process, Honert can perhaps overlook the works fraught personal implications in exchange for a conversation about late-60s kitsch.

Indeed, there might be a third, more directly artworld-related cause of Honert's reluctance to leave a reading up to critics and observers. He came of age in an artistic environment entirely invested in questions of concept, minimalism, and the political. Throughout his career he has given wide berth to such themes and tendencies in the art world at large, with the work's explicitly childish naïveté implicitly confronting these tendencies. While suggesting a deeper intent behind his face-value enjoyable works may only go to exemplify our remaining mired in such conventions, despite post-modernism's refutation of some of conceptual art's more redemptive aspect. It may also help situate Honert's work in a schema beyond our simultaneous entrenchment in artistic intent, such that it survives in collective memory long after the Fliegenden Klassenzimmer has hit a memorial dead end.

Forbes, Alexander. "Martin Honert Goes on a Crusade for the Young of Body and Mind at the Hamburger Bahnhof," *ARTINFO*. 10 October 2012.

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MARTIN HONERT'S 'KINDERKREUZZUG' AT HAMBERGER BAHNHOF
October, 2012

Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof, is a former railway station which now serves as the city's Museum für Gegenwart, or "Museum for the Present". I visited the renowned contemporary art museum eager to see their permanent Marx collection centered around the work of Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly, and Andy Warhol. I had also heard great things about the current solo exhibition, Martin Honert's Kinderkreuzzug, in the main hall. I approached the ticket booth with my pass to all of Berlin's Nationalgalerie museums and was disappointed to hear that it would only grant me access to the museum's permanent collection. But as I peered over the head of the seated ticket lady and saw what looked like life-sized action fig-

ures and sculptural re-enactments of scenes from picture books from my childhood. My inner 6 year old begged me to see the exhibition Lacking the extra 5 euros the exhibition would cost, I decided to walk confidently past the ticket-checkers hoping they wouldn't stop me. And I'm glad that I did.

In Kinderkreuzzug, Honert transforms memories from his childhood into elaborate three-dimensional objects. Standing in front of his installations, I experienced a collection of wide-ranging snapshots from the impressionable memories of a child. Honert works from his old photographs, childhood drawings, and images directly imprinted in his memory to create dramatized illustrations of specific moments from his own biography.

Artist Martin Honert was born in Bottrop, a city in the Ruhr region of West Germany, in 1953. Specific aspects of West Germany during this time are highly present in Kinderkreuzzug, which relies on images from Honert's youth to serve as glimpses into the specific time and place in which he grew up. I felt like I was inside of Honert's memory as I walked through models of native trees, typical architecture of the Ruhr Valley, illustrations of the his father's cigar boxes' contents, family photos, and imagined visions of children stories and historical events depicted in fantastical drawings.

Potepan, Nina. "Martin Honter's 'Kinderkreuzzug' at Hamburger Bahnhof," San Francisco Arts Quarterly. October 2012.

These are just a few examples of deep seeded images cemented in Honert's memory and actualized in the exhibition Kinderkreuzzug.

Together, these moments fully realized in life-size sculptural works transcend his own personal memory and depict the socialization of an entire generation raised in West Germany in the 1950's. Each piece was numbered and accompanied by a corresponding explanation written by the artist himself in the small exhibition catalogue. With this addition, Honert explains the significance of each object that the viewer simultaneously encountered dramatized before them in life-size form.

Potepan, Nina. "Martin Honter's 'Kinderkreuzzug' at Hamburger Bahnhof," San Francisco Arts Quarterly. October 2012.

Martin Honert at Matthew Marks

Martin Honert's drawings and sculptures replicate in meticulous detail his own childhood sketches and give form to images from his earliest memories. Both two- and three-dimensional works faithfully reproduce each wavy, uncertain line of his source material. His interest, he has said, is in "a personal theme but a very dry presentation," creating tension between cute and clinical, affectionate and exacting.

Sketches, a suite of 28 laser prints on letter-sized sheets (all works 2006 or '07), extended along two walls in his latest exhibition. Several of them included, side by side, a reproduction of an early drawing and a recent re-drafting of it. The title identifies them as studies; those who saw Honert's 2004 show at Marks might have recognized a group of rubbery-limbed boys with a bicycle, a lumpy Santa Claus and armored knights with a cannon. Other drawings represent a pair of kneeling altar boys, a tent pitched in the forest and a starling perched on a branch.

Included were sketches for two new sculptures that were this show's main attraction, one of them a landscape diorama set into the gallery wall, the other a pair of giants seemingly caught in a pensive moment. Crafted from painted polyurethane and actual hair, these oversize men—each stands about 10 feet tall—wear jeans and hooded sweatshirts; one carries a backpack and the other a duffel bag. Satisfying details of their clothing, like dirty, worn knees and scuffed shoes, imply many miles traveled, and their sad eyes and

Boucher, Brian. "Martin Honert," *Art in America*. February 2008, pp. 141-142.

faraway gazes—one studies the floor, one looks into the distance—suggest that they're a long way from home. Based on the artist's memories of circuses in which human curiosities were on display, they are not only enormous but also have hammy hands and thick, broad features.

While *Giants* explores the massive, *River Landscape* delves into the miniature. At 3½ by 8 by 5 feet, it is a minutely detailed vista of a waterway winding through hills populated by hundreds of tiny trees, complete with dead branches and dry leaves. Flickering light projected onto a screen from above simulates rippling water. Every few minutes, a toy train, bright red and double-decked, rolls out of a tunnel at one end, vanishes into another mid-landscape, then reappears before chugging into the mouth of another tunnel.

Honert has fun with exaggerated perspective. At the diorama's front edge are individual blades of plastic grass and some spindly branches; a few inches beyond, full-grown trees stand just a foot high. And the train appears in two different versions, a larger one closer to the viewer and a smaller one farther away. (I only wish the gallery had let me figure this out, rather than explaining it in the press release.)

Many artists use industrial fabricators; gallery staff confirm that these works were created by the 54-year-old Honert himself, in his Düsseldorf studio. Not surprisingly, his output is limited, and it seems only right that works which so powerfully telescope from the present to a distant yet vividly remembered childhood should be few and far between.

—Brian Boucher

Martin Honert: *Giants*, 2007, mixed mediums, approx. 10¼ feet tall; at Matthew Marks.

Boucher, Brian. "Martin Honert," *Art in America*. February 2008, pp. 141-142.

Martin Honert
Matthew Marks Gallery, through Apr 24 (see Chelsea).


Martin Honert, *Santa Claus*, 2002.

Art about memory, especially when it takes on the subject of childhood, often buries itself in the kind of tawdry confessionals and neurotic self-regard that lead to endless forms of navel-gazing, or road maps to the land of "me." Martin Honert's exhibition of seven large-scale sculptures, based on drawings he made between the ages of eight and ten, offers a quiet respite from the solipsistic din. (There are two exceptions: a mural-sized re-creation of a Düsseldorf sidewalk and a snapshot-based work, *Mirage* (1996), featuring a huge transparency of the artist as a boy on the beach building a sand castle.)

Honert's relationship to his childhood drawings suggests an archivist with his collection: his meticulously faithful reproductions, rendered life-size and in three dimensions, are acts of preservation. Memory, in Honert's view, is reliable only when unmediated by subjective content. As Boris Gorys points out in his essay for the exhibition catalog, the artist's approach is analogous to the use of readymades in Pop art. But while his emotional detachment, along with the work's clean lines, bright colors and cartoonish style, conveys a distinctly Pop aesthetic, there is nothing deadpan about Honert's work, as two of the strongest sculptures, *Knight's Battle* (2003) and *Santa Claus* (2002), make clear. Like a giant molded-tin Christmas ornament, the latter turns a simple pencil drawing of old Saint Nick into a glittering gold figure who stands regally beside his sack. Made of wood, polystyrene and paint, the work is a mute and obstinate presence—as idiosyncratic and arbitrary as memory itself.—*Jane Harris*

Harris, Jane. "Martin Honert," *Time Out New York*. 8-15 April 2004, p. 54.

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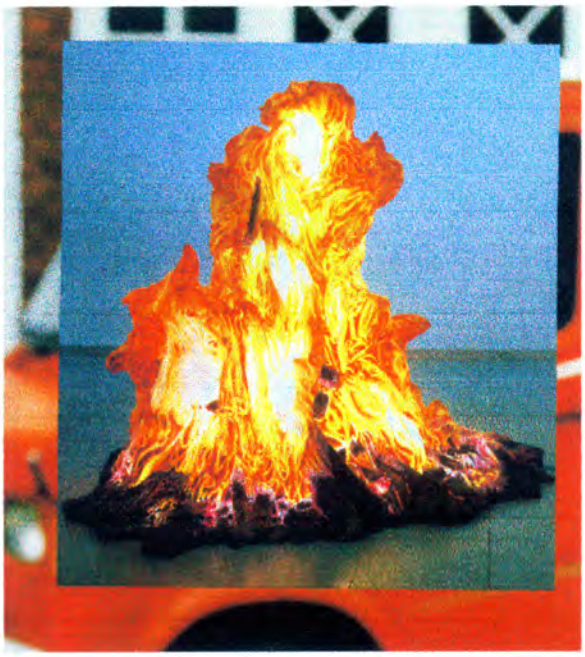
MIND'S EYE VIEWS

Martin Honert works slowly—he has produced fewer works than one expects from an artist his age. Unwilling to compete with the speed and communicative demands of the modern media, he makes works that seem to stand alone—"decontextualized" and uncommunicative. Together, these works don't so much constitute a closed context as suggest a kind of semantic emptiness. One suspects relationships among Honert's three-dimensional images, perhaps shared meanings, but they are never explicitly produced.

Visiting Honert in his studio in Düsseldorf, I wanted to ask: what are the reasons behind Honert's slow procedures and the aura of isolation surrounding his works? Honert's first reply, as is often the case with artists, was a technical one: it is because the works are time-consuming to produce that it takes time to produce them. The questioner was unsatisfied by the answer: aren't the techniques used *because* they slow the work down?

—*BG*

Groys, Boris. "Mind's Eye View," *ArtForum.* February 1995, pp. 52-61.



BORIS GROYS: *Looking at your works, I have the feeling that these three-dimensional pictures so objectively quoting reality—they're like a photograph, or an illustration in a scientific journal—suggest also a certain feeling of danger, of being lost. Isn't that an allegory for the situation of the contemporary artist, who removes himself from the life context and puts himself instead in the institutional context of art?*

MARTIN HONERT: That's not the reason I do these works. I very much like the images in dictionaries, where, for example, under the word "fire" there's a little picture of a fire. That's actually an image in the clearest sense of the word: so, that's what a fire is! Those pictures always seem alone, isolated, removed from their context. And that's what interests me about them—this hermetic quality of being closed in on themselves.

BG: *But are those sorts of illustration dictated by the usual, pictorial understanding of the image? As you say, they fall under a certain linguistic logic: "house," "fire," "tree"—they function almost like ciphers, or Platonic ideas corresponding to particular concepts.*

MH: Certainly.

BG: *You ask, for example, What is a house for me? And you answer with an image.*

MH: Exactly. My works begin in an internal image. *Haus* [House, 1988] is like an image seen with one's eyes closed.

BG: *But there are so many linguistic concepts—why produce so few images? Why this severe selection?*

MH: I want to start small. It's a question of temperament: I'm scared of large, complex relationships. I need to begin with simple images, single images. I don't want to show other people what a house looks like; I want to show myself. And when I'm doing that, I try to purify the house, to show it as cleanly as possible.

BG: *Why this cleansing, this universalization?*

MH: I don't want my work to get too personal. I may begin with a personal image, but then I try to see how I can formulate a more general one. In the case of *Haus*, that building is completely a particular type. I've always known houses like this one; it has an ugly modesty that's absolutely commonplace where I come from. So this house is autobiographical, in that it's tied to my own biography, my own history. At the same time, it has nothing specific to do with me—my grandmother didn't live there, I wasn't born there, nothing like that. I don't want to tell stories, so I try to reduce the image to its purest state.

BG: *The region you come from is important to you?*

MH: Yes, it matters that I come from the Ruhr. A lot of the images I use are deeply connected to it.

BG: *I know a lot of artists who want to get away from those kinds of ties: they want something universal, something shared, something valid everywhere.*

Groys, Boris. "Mind's Eye View," *ArtForum.* February 1995, pp. 52-61.

MH: That's certainly an interesting theme for many of my colleagues, but it doesn't interest me, and it would be dangerous for my work—the more universal I became, the more risk I'd run of getting flat and pathetic. That would be terrible for me. And art about art doesn't interest me, I don't think about it for a second. That's something I find really stupid, I have to say.

BG: *Yet your work does have a relationship to the great purist, universalist canon of 20th-century art. It's not expressive, not surrealistic, not subjective, personally motivated though it is. Rather, its formal simplicity and purity suggest a certain universality. It seems to me you always try to balance a strong regional anchoring and a universalist, abstract, neutral component.*

MH: Not consciously, probably—I don't approach artmaking that way. But I'd hope that would be the end result. Those kinds of contradictions really interest me, and one contradiction in particular: a personal theme but a very dry presentation.

Martin Honert, *Starling*, 1992, painted polyester, 76¼ x 67⅛ x 6⅛".

I KNOW EXACTLY WHEN SOMETHING BECOMES KITSCH, AND WHAT I HAVE TO DO TO PREVENT THAT FROM HAPPENING. THIS IS EXACTLY THE BALANCING ACT THAT INTERESTS ME.

BG: *You're reminding me of a notorious warning that used to be issued in the gulag before a march: one step to either the left or the right, and you'll be shot. That's how you describe your working process: one step to the left, in the sense of sinking into the personal, or one to the right, in the sense of abstraction and generalization—both are dangerous for you.*

MH: Both are traps, yes. I'm aware of this brinksmanship. Something else I'm often accused of—kitsch—is also brinksmanship: I know exactly when something becomes kitsch, and what I have to do to prevent that from happening. This is exactly the balancing act that interests me.

BG: *Your objects or three-dimensional images, I find, also have some scenic quality, a quality of theatrical representation: "I represent a house," "I represent a bird." Two works in which this is particularly clear are* Kinderkreuzzug *(Children's crusade, 1985–87) and* Foto *(1993). Do these too have to do with a certain brinksmanship, between reality and the representation of reality? Theater lives on that edge.*

Groys, Boris. "Mind's Eye View," *ArtForum.* February 1995, pp. 52-61.

MH: I'm certainly interested in the tension between reality and spectacle, or between reality and reality's theatricalization. In *Kinderkreuzzug* I tried to create an intermediary stage: the figures quote toy figures, toy knights, but I made them life-sized. You still see, though, that they are representations not of people but of objects.

BG: *In the theater there is a tension between the concrete and the universal. The scene is a general frame for a concrete spectacle. This also relates to photography, which puts a concrete image into a general frame. Photography is deeply theatrical—it always looks "produced."*

MH: I agree. What interests me in photography is its frozen quality. This is very important in *Foto*, and even more so in *Feuer* [Fire, 1992]: we only know fire as something shapeless and motile. I always want to freeze things into an image, a "scene."

BG: *But why this attraction to the frozen? Is it that by freezing a memory, an internal image or idea, you can guarantee it in the outside world?*

MH: Fire has no need of stability, but the inner image of fire demands a stable, frozen sign.

BG: *You work with the abstract space of art, and with the personal experiences for which you create visual signs in this space. What do you think about the space of art as a social institution—the social space of the art world? Do you think about how to position yourself in art's social space? Or is this an irrelevant question for you?*

MH: I know a number of artists well, and we understand each other well, because we have the same interests—personal things from the past, from childhood. Other artists can't understand my interests, and I can't understand theirs, although their work may be interesting formally. Actually, I've never met someone where I both admired their work formally and shared their interests.

BG: *Since I've never met an artist who thought another artist handled the balance of form and content better than he did, that kind of meeting is perhaps impossible.*

MH: Perhaps ... I live as a lonely man among the lonely

GROYS / HONERT *continued from page 60*

Fritsch and I had the same teacher. Those connections are really close, from the place where we both were born.

BG: *So we're back to the regional. And your work, actually, produces a kind of childhood: you produce your own origin out of a trove or archive of childhood memories, an archive that everyone has. But do you work with childhood as a fund of personal experience, or as something at a distance, a distance that prevents you from sinking into a certain feeling? Childhood is always in the past; one can only produce it. Actual experience of it is impossible.*

MH: I don't think I'm involved in the problems of my childhood—I am indirectly, of course, but I'm not directly stuck in that emotional world. That is an important point. Childhood is a theme for me not because I think my childhood was especially eventful, or bad, or good; my childhood was exactly as dull and boring as every other childhood. Childhood is a theme for me because I think it's important to discover what's way past but still in the memory as an image. The farther back it is and the more I remember it anyway, the more important it is for me. This has nothing to do with psychoanalysis; there are certainly ugly and beautiful things in my childhood, things I want to overcome and things I want to or have to live with, but those things don't interest me as an artist. People have asked me whether my work has a therapeutic side, but I consciously distance myself from that side of art.

BG: *In time the child we were becomes an Other, a stranger, to whom we believe we have access inside. There's another kind of brinksmanship here, between familiarity and foreignness. Perhaps that's what produces the desire to make images of childhood?*

MH: That's true. Our childhood is absolutely our own history, what we know best. Yet at the same time it's very far away and hidden. I'm interested in the point where something radiates from the hidden, something I still feel clearly today. There's something meaningful in that.

I can tell you something anecdotal, for example—though I really don't like to—about *Kinderkreuzzug*. That was the first work where I consciously started with an inner image: a memory of sitting in history class when I was ten. We were talking about the crusades, and the teacher said, "There was once a children's crusade too." He mentioned this by-the-by, but as he said it, I got a clear image. It was as if—this is a little exaggerated, but it was as if the blackboard opened up and became a window, and I saw the child knights coming toward me. That image was sparked by a single word, *Kinderkreuzzug*. I can still remember it precisely today.

BG: *That's a good end to our conversation: the child approaching himself as an armed knight.* □

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Translated from the German by Charles V. Miller.

Groys, Boris. "Mind's Eye View," *ArtForum*. February 1995, pp. 52-61.

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MARTIN HONERT

OUT OF THE DEADPAN

JOSÉ LEBRERO STALS

Certain artists, when they set about creating a work of art, destroy or at least dispose of the first attempt if it fails to turn out according to plan. Others — the minority of artists — spend a long time thinking about how it might turn out and only when they are sure that they have a precise idea of what they are aiming at are they capable of giving material form to their idea.

A great deal of time is dedicated to each piece until every element involved fits into place. The end result is not always satisfactory, but it must at least approximate the image the artist originally had. There is no going back. Martin Honert has yet to feel one hundred percent certain, although he is genuinely convinced that he would defend any work in his catalogue despite the fact that nothing ever manages to do full justice to every aspect of the all-round, referential images that he originally has in mind. For this we should be grateful as soon as an artist believes he has fully achieved his target he ceases to be an artist.

"I try to achieve the highest degree of perfection in reaching the image I have but nothing ever comes out as it should," says the artist[1]. What motivates this artist are his aspirations to the ideal or, rather, the formation of existence as a naked idea or concept as opposed to reality; a state of being in objective existence. Yet, if by this we mean an attempt to get behind something, even if the process may end up interrupted, then the artist should, without too many serious difficulties, survive the failure.

"It is not that I want to speculate on misfortune, but I know that however well things start out they need not necessarily turn out the way I want them to. This is what happened when I made *Tree* (1992). I said to myself, 'Try and reproduce what you have in your imagination as precisely as possible, right down to the last detail, but, Martin, do not forget that nothing is going to work.' The work of art always results as a stylization or a simplification and that is the only thing you can count on."

The spectre of failure is ever present when there is this urgent need to pin something down which you can only see, the mental image before it is something tangible. "That was not the case with *Fire* (1992), which worked right from the outset. The creation process was problem-free. First I made the model in plaster and then the negative, although at that point I still did not know what color I would paint it. With this definitive — although unpainted — form, I continued to have faith in its working out." The happiness apparent in *Fire* seems to deprive sorrow of its place.

From the very beginning, Martin Honert knew that he did not want to treat fire as a destructive element but as the site and the meeting place for popular culture rather than culture in the mythical sense. As any country-dweller is well aware, when autumn arrives a fire is made. "I admit there is something very ritualistic about making a fire but it is also true that the process is linked to a very pragmatic conception of life. In spring, the garbage is disposed of and burnt. The functional goes hand in hand with the ritual. This is what I was after and I accentuated it through the dimension of the work." The resulting piece was a huge fire with very high flames.

In visual experience, objectivization is pushed to a greater extent than in tactile experience and, consequently, we might flatter ourselves into thinking that it is we who constitute the world because visual experience presents us with a spectacle, albeit from a distance, and gives us the illusion that we are immediately present everywhere and situated nowhere.

— Merleau-Ponty, *Phénomenologie de la perception*, p. 365.

The raw materials for these works apparently come from the most commonplace sources. Honert avoids touching upon "significant" themes and in no way evokes the figure of the artist angling at art criticism and muttering about being "interested in themes of death" or "the loss of truth from egocentric, auratic structures."

"I prefer those themes characterized by their absolutely reductive intention and total clarity.These are considerations of primordial importance and allow the work to stand up; otherwise it would fall. Although he does not necessarily fit into this context, On Kawara is a good example. This is an artist who addresses time with great metaphysical clout despite the fact that, formally, he is simple and elemental and his work functions perfectly. The great risk involved in dealing with 'themes' is that there be a lack of simplicity which threatens to turn the work of art into something kitsch and unrefined. I am not uninterested in kitsch, but the unrefined, excuse me, is something hideous and it would be absurd to aspire to it. It is not even funny; it is pitiful. My interest in everyday concerns and triviality is due to my predilection for realistic representation. Simplicity and mundanity is what is closest to us. The various motifs of my work are culled from my own life and the way I perceive the world in my endeavor to examine it. This was the case with *Table with Trembling Pudding*. I put a lot of thought into it. The table is made in the same way as any other table. Since I was the one who was going to make the piece, I was convinced that it should be illuminated in some mysterious way in order to differentiate it from other tables. It had to be just so because I was creating it according to very special, personal conditions. The external aspect of the work was in no way different from any other table, but considering the work I had in mind, there had to be something like an aura (*smiles*), a light, a glow."

The dimensions of the table are themselves peculiar: not quite big enough for two people but large enough for one — dimensions which were dependent on the pudding which marked the origin of the piece. The idea relates back to the years Honert spent at boarding school, good times and bad for the artist, which thwart any interpretation of the piece as an instance of the artist's personal revenge. Honert had abandoned psychological art as well as the excessive presence of personal concerns in his work, gradually tending toward "interiors" in the faith that this would afford a greater opportunity for a more profound representation of the tensions, the memories, the smells, and the tastes he set out to give form to.

Children's Crusade (1988) is an

Lebrero Stals, Jose. "Martin Honert: Out of the Deadpan," *Flash Art*. April 1993, p. 88.

allusion to a childhood image that Honert recalls from history class. In a lesson about the crusades, the teacher told his students at the end of the lesson, that there had also been a children's crusade which it was best not to dwell upon since it had come to a gruesome end. This was enough to arouse the artist's curiosity. Later, at the Academy of Fine Arts, Honert was reminded of children's plastic figurines and set out to create a work using them. At a certain point, both ideas — the children's crusade and the toys — came together. "The result was an authentic reconstruction of the times I spent playing and recreating scenarios. It took me almost three years to create them. Something kept coming back into my head and it had to be investigated because, as an adult, I was concerned with an image not from a book but which was a product of my imagination." The teacher's commentary had engendered in the artist the vivid image of a landscape, a scene in which he could see a group of children-crusaders accompanied by a team of professionals, not armed with toy weapons. "They were saying to me, 'Martin, come with us!'"

Was Honert turning childhood into something heroic by attempting to fasten down an image and give it permanence? Is this how heroes and myths are created? "It was important for me to capture this image. For one thing, I recalled my anguish as a child when adults refused to take me seriously and would say, 'Go and play outside.' I am sure that the games we used to play were not mere passtimes but very serious and we practiced them with the perfection of professionals. I think that finding out that those children took part in the crusades as soldiers helped me realize that my games were intended so seriously.

"To define the characterization of the figures, I chose to align myself with the typical way in which crusades are viewed. This work served to appease my abiding concern for childhood. *The Altar Boys* (1989) are formally similar to the *Children's Crusade*. The faces are painted so as to simulate the color of flesh; they are like puppets. This interpretation leads to some confusion as far as appreciation of the content is concerned. It has been said that the figurines appear to be blind, when what actually happened is that I refrained from painting in their eyes to accentuate that they were artificial figures.

"I once saw a film about Himalayan civilizations. They showed a Tibetan monastery where the high priest was a child of about six — he was the reincarnation of a religious leader. It was quite jolting to see him accepting this position at the very center of the service with such gravity and dignity, the concentration on his face as the monks

STARLING, 1992.
PAINTED POLYESTER, 195 X 171 X 16 CM.

brought him various delicacies and knelt before him like altar boys."

Honert was reminded of his experience as an altar boy, the pride and the sense of honor as he carried out a task that seemed so important to him then. "We felt like professionals on a stage."

Thus, Honert's interest in *The Children's Crusade* work was aroused. He perceived of them as being like common kitsch religious statuettes. Honert's altar boys — their clothes, their posture, their attitude — conjur up the idea of a religious trinket but they are not sacred. They are just normal, latter-day boys, a fact proven by the shoes and trousers visible from under their habits. "I was intringued by this mixture of religious article and profane reality and the opportunity to transmit this feeling of professionalism I wanted to confer upon them. Every Sunday, they carry out the mission that has been assigned to them perfectly." In *Children's Crusade*, on the other hand, what attracts the artist is the way in which a child can be put to use in what is a purely adult activity.

CHAIR AND TABLE, 1983. CHAIR: 87 X 42 X 43 CM; TABLE: 79 X 97 X 67 CM; PLATE: Ø 28 CM.

Let us consider any given form of sensory perception, that of a tree, for instance. Many philosophers state that we must make a distinction between man's perception of the tree and the tree itself or the tree 'in itself.'

— Erwin Schrödinger. *Meine Weltansicht, Mein Leben*, 1985.

The Tree (1990) is an expression of considerable anger. It took close to a year to complete and proved to be an unerringly horrific experience: every time I went back to the studio it was an enormous effort to get on with the work. Sometimes I would spy a piece of the work that had come out well and say to myself, 'If only the whole work could come out like that,' even if, in truth, all I could see was this monstrosity, a mixture of poisonous products harmful to one's health.

"My original idea was very romantic but when I got down to work, it began to turn into a monster to such an extent that whenever I got back from my daily struggle in the studio, I could make out, among the branches of a colored sketch I kept at home, the face of a monster watching me.

"Is the intention of a solution not to ensure the positive continuation of the being?"

— Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le pur et l'impur*, p. 67.

■

José Lebrero Stals is a critic based in Cologne.

(Translated from Spanish by a Christopher Martin)

Note

1. All quotes from an interview by the author, March 1993.

Martin Honert was born in 1953 in Bottrop.

Selected solo shows: 1988: Johnen & Schöttle, Cologne; 1990: Johnen & Schöttle, Cologne; 1991: Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich.

Selected group shows: 1988: Rüdiger Schöttle, Munich (with Elke Denda); 1989: Fondation De Appel, Amsterdam (with Katharina Fritsch and Thomas Ruff); 1990: "Carnet de Voyages," Fondation Cartier, Jouy-en-Josas (Paris); 1991: Bonner Kunstverein (with Pia Stadtbäumer), Bonn; "Anni '90," Galleria Communale d'Arte Moderna, Bologna/Cattolica/Rimini; 1992: Biennale of Sydney, Sydney; "Post Human," FAE, Pully/Lausanne (traveled); "Qui, quoi, ou?" Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt; 1993: Aperto '93, Venice Biennale.

Lebrero Stals, Jose. "Martin Honert: Out of the Deadpan," *Flash Art*. April 1993, p. 88.