



Aanant & Zoo

# MATERIAL CONCEPTUALISM

## THE COMFORT OF THINGS

September 7 – October 19, 2013

Opening Friday September 6, 2013, 7 pm

**Historically, the relation in art between material, form and content is riddled with conflict. Antique philosophers already claimed that the physical substance of an object had to be tamed by form and transcended by ideas in order to succeed as an artwork.**

In the 15th and 16th centuries, the idea increasingly became the prime category within art theory - and frequently material was not mentioned at all in favor of the dichotomy of form and content. In the 19th century, an attitude emerged that was later condensed into the concept of 'Materialgerechtigkeit' (material appropriateness). The work of art should be developed *out of the material*, as it were.

All these approaches can be found in the artistic practice of the 20th century. For instance, in early Concept Art material only served as the transmitter of ideas. Around the same time, a group of Italian artists bracketed under the Arte Povera label sought new ways to engage with material, bringing art more firmly into everyday life through their juxtaposition of refined and simple substances. Theirs was a decisive turn away from art composed of thought alone, created merely for an elite.

Since the spectrum of material usage and its stylistic applications has been radically expanded since Arte Povera, how are artists dealing with this matter today?

While wide in their conceptual nodes of interest, it is this concerted effort to engage with material that comes to the fore in Material Conceptualism. Two tenants become apparent in the selection of works: a simplicity of material and/or a simplicity of gesture.

Luis Camnitzer, for instance, places glass jars filled with all the 'ingredients' of a landscape painting onto a wooden shelf. The simplicity of materials used – cotton balls for clouds, blue pigment for sky – should not be understood as their being poor or unrefined. Instead, it is remarkable how they so effortlessly combine into an art-historical trope without quite mirroring the reality of a gaze at the horizon.

Another astute usage of material appears in *Untitled (The Bottles of Misery)* by Martin Bothe. Worth only their Pfand as individual entities, they have nonetheless been meticulously tended to when being pasted back together. Both in material and execution, they are entirely adulterated. Furthermore, they can be looked at in an explicitly

ATHANASIOS ARGIANAS  
ELENA BAJO  
MARTIN BOTHE  
AMY BRENER  
LUIS CAMNITZER  
ANGELA DE LA CRUZ  
ELISABETH DECKER  
JOCHEN DEHN  
JIMMIE DURHAM  
SIMRYN GILL  
BENJAMIN GREBER  
MICHAEL HAKIMI  
ROMUALD HAZOUMÈ  
BENJAMIN HIRTE  
SONIA KACEM  
VLADO MARTEK  
MICHAEL MÜLLER  
GIUSEPPE PENONE  
RUDOLF POLANSZKY  
ROBERT PRATT  
VALENTIN RUHRY  
GABRIEL SIERRA  
PASCAL TASSINI  
GEERTEN VERHEUS  
KLAUS WEBER



material-focused manner: toxic matter rendered non-renewable by their alteration.

These are only two examples of the twenty-five positions shown overall. However, most of the featured artists engage in a deconstruction of what we expect from material, whether by the choices that are made in the materials themselves or the way in which they are brought together.

*Material Conceptualism* does not seek to resolve the debates between idea, form and material. Neither does it seek to give one overarching name to a movement or group of artists. It does, however, combine two contradictory thoughts. On the one hand, concepts appear as subtle, almost ethereal ideas floating above the tangible, on the other, the physicality of the artworks claims center stage.

The exhibition's subtitle, *The Comfort of Things*, points to the many different purposes that the objects in our lives can fulfill. A work or art for instance may give us comfort and serve as a status symbol, it may be valuable despite being crafted from simple materials. The fact that many artists work with trivial materials indicates the constant expansion of the possibilities of aesthetic experience.

What are the consequences of overcoming the traditional understanding of the value of materials?

Through its selection of contemporary positions, *Material Conceptualism – The Comfort of Things* seeks to show what the results of a new debate on materials, especially 'simple' ones, could look like.

Material Conceptualism is the second installment of an annually recurring series at Aanant & Zoo with the aim of exploring in depth one particular philosophical and art-historical topic. It follows *From The Age of the Poets* in 2012.

**At the opening, there will be a performance by Jochen Dehn: "Gravity bores me she says and for a moment you think you are talking about falling objects" – a demonstration concerning love and trust.**

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### OPENING

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### OPENING HOURS

Wed – Sat, 11 am – 6 pm

and by appointment

### FURTHER INFORMATION

A catalogue with images, artist interviews and texts by Alexander Forbes and Lukas Töpfer has been published and is available in the gallery.

### CONTACT

contact@aanantzoo.com

t. +49 30 81 80 18 73

www.aanantzoo.com