

Every Solution brings new problems: About Bernhard Frue

*If you have something that you don't
want anyone to know, maybe you
shouldn't be doing it in the first place.*

(Eric Schmidt, CEO Google)

Bernhard Fruehwirth changed his name with the presentation of his global project PHESBUK. Bernhard Frue exposes social phenomena such as image cultivation and the loss of privacy within the context of the portrait right up to the dissolution of existence. In his work, Frue investigates variations in perception and self-reflection relative to the constituted subject perennially under threat of dissolution, (de)construction and fleetingness.

The starting point is an artist's book that Frue created using faces cut from newspapers and magazines, in part over worked, between '(% and '()'. Frue "draws" the faces "out" with ballpoint pen until they detach themselves from the newspaper of their own accord. This selection process extracts countless faces separated from their original context from the medial information flood, which are then arranged according to the artist's own criteria into a series or rather cycle of images.

For Frue the motivation behind his chosen method is the search for a topically adequate treatment of the portrait as subject matter. "I began work on this book during my first stay in hospital when newspapers represented a window and contact with the outside world for me. An initial visual and emotional stimulant were people who were permanently covered in the media and who upset me, which was also physically tangible due to my weak constitution. I quickly lost interest in celebrities and the selection of photos focussed on the faces of 'unknown people'. The cut-out faces are all that remain of the flood of information."

The original artist's book is exhibited in a dimmed room in an object akin to a display case constructed from steel and acrylic glass and standing in front of steel shelving mounted high overhead. This shelf has almost the whole edition of)"(copies on it. The BUK, which can also be paged through in an animated version, represents a model of coping on the one hand while on the other it is a scrutiny of the filters that process our perception on a daily basis in regard to the "fetish" face. In this formally serial work, variations of perpetual sameness occur within a chronology influenced by the media: the presentation and disclosure of a flood of anonymous faces greedy for significance and attention.

The large format UV-prints on maple veneer, such as KeaneStrichFelix and DiamondTheodor, were developed from freeware models taken from the internet whose templates or rather stencils, like paper cut-outs, show readily recognisable depictions of the faces of predominantly well-known personalities reduced to the essentials. The subject disintegrates in the overlapping and partially

concealed motifs.

The work PopSalGeneWood, for example, shows the faces of Popeye, Salvador Dalí, Gene Simmons and Woody Allen. “All ages generate types with similar physiognomies,” is Frue’s comment on these portraits created from fragmented overlays. The way they have been worked gives them an appearance reminiscent of washed-out, tattered and discarded woodcuts, which restores some plasticity to the faces.

Hanging very close to the UV-prints, the work Thinx consists of four drawings mounted on wood with adhesive tape. Like Frue’s other script images, the draughtsmanship in Thinx follows an intricate process with Indian ink being applied to prefabricated typographies on a painted white ground of multiple layers, and lightly smudged during the working process. This also provides the paper ultimately with a “body” and a haptic quality, an impression which is heightened by the wooden backing. The script works follow rules and a formal if also unusual language which seek recognition through their fragmentary replication. The script images revolve around appellative, encrypted statements, communicative wordplay and follow an almost lyrical, (auto-) aggressive process of “putting into words”, which is also certainly to be taken as a direct invitation to the spectator for dialogue from the artist as well as the works. Frue jolts the dogma of self-awareness by strengthening the subjective in the object and letting it speak to us. In one of these drawings, Frue, with the overlapping notation of the exclamations OHO and UHU, takes up the sign of the cross and that of the arrow which both carry a simply associable meaning in their clear symmetry and ornamental character and simultaneously refer to an extra-linguistic, causally transmitted level of the production of knowledge.

The symbols of the cross and arrow play a central role in the video works TrustMe and BlahBlahPenser. Script images, such as “Fair & Lovely” and “Es leben die Ketten”, are worked into the symbols revolving on a vertical axis, which unravel a cryptic if in itself coherent network of interaction between image and text, and construct a curiously suggestive dynamic as appellative around the video objects revolving around themselves.

In PHESBUK Frue extends his approach to drawing to the medium of video. Frue uses and questions the formal similarities of both media by bringing the sketch character of the drawings and the playfully dynamic operational approach of video together. With the causal orientation on the classical genre of portraiture, Frue also promotes a topical interpretation of image cultivation and devotes himself to the themes of reflection and self-reflection, disentanglement and disintegration, and rhythm and codification. By overlapping these specific qualities of drawing and video, Frue introduces the spectator to various ways of perceiving the “fetish” face.

However, Frue does not show any classical portraits in his videos. Instead it is much more about a metaphorical extension of the face into its “body” and into the body’s organs. In the *-D animation Crashsink, things Frue does not like or that frighten him crash onto a milky, reflecting surface which positively swallows them accompanied by a threatening and fateful gong. Similar to the

planes hijacked for a sinister mission on heart, lungs, a cigarette packet, a flower and plane seats, and also presumably the associated memories, crash against this all-swallowing wall. In this act of loss and destruction Crashesink also gives rise to the hope of forgetting and beginning again, as if new objects, organs and bodies could come into being on the other side in order to escape one's own fate a little in the end.

In Exercise in Proportion and Cut Frue directs the video camera onto apartment windows illuminated at night in search of the people behind those countless faces which surface in social networks like Facebook and become anonymous through their repetitiousness. The shadows flitting past give only a rough idea of what might be going on in the apartments, whose inhabitants are not torn from their anonymity by this obtrusive attempt at intruding upon their privacy. In its search for the people behind the faces, Exercise in Proportion and Cut intercommunicates with the artist's book and it is therefore quite coherent that the three video projectors used for the former are placed on the sculpture Turtle, which contains the maculature and printing plates of the book. In the video works Ket and Tschicken this failed attempt at forging identity is taken to an extreme with humour as the physiognomy and self awareness of animals and not people is the subject of investigation. Cats and a chicken find themselves in an internally glazed mirror box and are obviously being confronted with their reflection for the first time. They are left alone with endless reflections in a confined space. The chicken does not appear to be perturbed by the situation at all. Strutting slowly back and forth, it peers at itself in the mirror. The two cats are visibly more unsettled and soon flee from the mirror box. The mirror box Gefäss, the actual filming location of the video, is also exhibited and seems to float in space despite its weight. Two other mirror boxes are also on show opposite one another, Gefügig and Gesäss, in which spectators can see themselves reflected endlessly.

In the flood of images in PHESBUK Bernhard Frue is, if nothing else, confronting us with ourselves by examining the portrait in its genre immanent seriality for its topicality and representability, and allocating a specific body of text and image to individual faces, providing their fragile fragmentariness with a slightly more durable footing.

Sandro Droschl