

PRESSBOOK

Thilo HEINZMANN

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Agatha Christie once described herself as a specialist in 'murders of quiet, domestic interest'. Like Christie, who wove intrigue into the fabric of a staid and frigid society, Thilo Heinzmann reanimates 20th-century painting with the morbid flair of a crime writer. In his three-dimensional wall-mounted work, *Untitled* (2009), a range of carved Styrofoam blocks mounted on a white background seems immutable behind their museum-friendly Perspex casing. Look closer, however, and you notice tiny flecks of red matter peppered across the whiteness. These are fragments of bloodstone, a gem that has variously been used as an aphrodisiac (in India), and to ward off the evil eye (in medieval Europe). Its presence here, embedded in splashes of epoxy resin, resonates like the evidence of a mysterious event.

Heinzmann's first solo exhibition at Carl Freedman Gallery featured poised and discreet works that explore motifs inherited from Arte Povera and post-Minimalism. A graduate of Frankfurt's Städelschule, where he studied for five years from 1992, Heinzmann is part of a lineage of gently subversive German neo-formalists including Heimo Zobernig, Günther Förg and Imi Knoebel. The subtlety of their approach is easily lost beside the goulash of anti-Modernism: the Neue Wilde rampage of Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen, or Isa Genzken's memorably-titled series 'Fuck the Bauhaus' (2000). By contrast, Heinzmann's tactical use of anachronism is evident here in the work *Aicmo* (2008) (the title is the artist's own neologism), an aluminium board ruptured into a pun on Lucio Fontana's perforated works from the late 1950s. Where Fontana's affiliations with the void were spiritual, Heinzmann's method seems calculated – the holes here are carefully knocked through and disrupt only a small portion of the surface. It's a jocose exercise executed with a minimum of effort: if anything, *Aicmo* resembles a car panel struck by a thin wave of bullets in a drive-by shooting, rather than Fontana's cosmic, densely honeycombed canvases.

Heinzmann's careful selection of materials is key to the disjunctive register of these works. For the Arte Povera group of the late 1960s, the use of incongruous and varied media was an expression of humanist freedom unrestrained by the forces of capitalism – Germano Celant's 1967 manifesto 'Arte povera: Appunti per una guerriglia' (Arte Povera: Notes for a Guerrilla War), began with the words 'First came man, then the system'. By contrast, another of Heinzmann's untitled works from 2009, which consists of strips of hessian sacking arranged into a rectangle gridded by angular lines of epoxy resin, is as carefully stage-managed as Vivienne Westwood's punkish haute couture. Recalling Alberto Burri's burlap-festooned canvasses, Jannis Kounellis' coal-stuffed sacks or Joseph Beuys' copious heaps of felt, it lacks the fearsome existential uncertainty of the post-World War II generation. Heinzmann, who has previously employed a variety of organic materials (including rabbit fur, badger fur and seashells), eschews Beuys' cathartic, talismanic use of 'nature'. Here, natural materials epitomize intersubjective values, rather than Beuys' messianic notion of a remedial 'outside' beyond culture.

While Heinzmann is clearly attempting a conceptual reorientation of Modernism towards a post-humanist present, this isn't the full story. *Liebepaar* (Loving Couple, 2009) and *Fruchtbares Land* (Fertile Country, 2009) are canvases of white, textured oil paint, against which dashes of pigment have been rather artfully thrown. The artifice of these gestures might be deflationary, but these works are also deeply committed to the romance of studio painting: *Liebepaar* is rendered in portrait format and the *Fruchtbares Land* is an abstract, but discernibly pastoral, landscape. Heinzmann's work moves gently into the past to simultaneously dramatize and re-value art's bloodied domestic tiffs.

Colin Perry