

Marlon Wobst interviewed by Maren Möhlenkamp, March 2020

Maren Möhlenkamp: Dear Marlon, this is now your sixth solo show at SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY. This exhibition is entitled *SPA*, it runs from March 6 to April 11, 2020. For the second time, you will be showing felt works with a great variety of both motifs and of colours and formats. What do you look forward to with each exhibition? Is there something specific you are looking forward to in this next exhibition?

Marlon Wobst: Goodness, the sixth show? I'm getting old... Still, every exhibition offers me an opportunity to show everybody what I'm doing all day - in this case, there will be mainly large felt works. Their production was really quite challenging.

MM: Why is the show called *SPA*? Is there a story behind the title?

MW: *SPA* fits quite well in the series of titles of previous exhibitions at the gallery. In 2015, for example, we had the show *KONDITION*, where the motifs were, broadly speaking, about the purely human activity of physical exercise, so that *SPA*, as a place where you can recover and refresh body and mind, was a logical next step.

MM: Your felt works don't just have unusual motifs, ranging from naked bodies to traffic scenes, but they also stand out because of their strong, almost garish colours, like pink or bright yellow, but also for their darker, saturated colours like brown, black, or green. These contrasts really make these works shine. Can you tell me something about the work process? Do you choose the colours of a work before you settle on the motif, or is it the other way round? Or perhaps there is no fixed sequence?

MW: The colours are fabulous, right? I buy everything as it is from a wool wholesaler, I haven't dyed anything myself (so far). There is a broad spectrum of colours. Just as with painting, the colours find themselves, on their own, as it were, though with felt, there are far more bright, clear colour shades, because colours can't be mixed very easily. Therefore I was forced to deal with these bright colours, after having used such effects very sparingly with oil paints, preferring to add a bit of gray to all colours. But I think these clear colours work well, especially in this material. We'll have to see what my next oil paintings will look like!

MM: Sounds great, can't wait to see them! Do the felt works in the exhibition have a common theme, or does every work stand alone and tell its own story? How do you find your motifs? Or do they perhaps find you?

MW: As I said before, most of the motifs are located in a spa - or at least they could be located there. Physical exercise, washing, love, table tennis, nudity. But when I develop the motifs, the colours, composition, and the structure of the colour fields play the more important role; the content keeps me grounded during the creative process.

MM: Of the six exhibitions you had at SCHWARZ CONTEMPORARY, the current one is the second with felt works. How did you first start working with felt? Are there other artists who also work with felt who inspired you? What about this material is special for you?

MW: No, there were no other artists who directly inspired me. Certainly many others have worked with felt, but I have never seen anybody use wool in this way. A few years ago I saw a pillowcase which the son of one of my friends had felted in kindergarten, and

I liked the range of painterly elements that such a little thing can have – it was maybe fifteen by twenty-five centimetres, and it contained flows, superimpositions of colours, soft and hard borders, and those bright colours. I couldn't get that out of my mind, and then I started to experiment and to see how I might produce a plane, a kind of carpet out of wool that will hold and be a picture on the wall, but also have a consistent surface. What was special for me was the realisation that I can now create with the 'paint', i.e. the wool, also the support, whose format I can determine myself, in contrast to a canvas that has a prescribed format.

MM: Are there also certain challenges when you produce a felt work, where you had to learn how deal with the material, or where you had to find alternative solutions? How has your work with felt developed since you first started?

MW: I had to learn everything from scratch, and develop many solutions for my special requirements. Currently there are two areas that I find especially attractive: how large the works can become, and how I can produce individual elements that I can subsequently bring together in one work, which means I allow for a certain relief quality. In the current exhibition there will be one work where you can see this relief quality quite well, and some that hint at what formats are yet to come.

MM: In addition to the works in felt, you have been painting for more than twenty years, and you have made quite a few ceramics as well. In terms of content, clearly all the works originate from the same mind, but are there marked differences in the creative process with the three different materials? Do the various disciplines embody different things for you?

MW: Of course, all techniques follow their own rules. Oils stink, clay is super dusty after the first day of working with it, and wool pills like crazy. But of course the creation itself is always the same, but the different methods influence each other in quite unexpected ways.

MM: When I last visited your studio, you were making a felt costume for your daughter, who wanted to dress up as a tiger for carnival. Are the possibilities of working with felt really as endless as it seems? Do you also make different works, or for example three-dimensional works, with felt?

MW: I play around a lot with the material, but I'm not planning an edition of covers for hot water bottles or something like that. In my work, I use the material exclusively to paint. But I once made egg warmers as a birthday present for my friend Sebastian Meschenmoser, one in the shape of my head, and one in the shape of his.

Translation: Wilhelm Werthern