

## My Private Passion – The Hubert Looser Collection

Common thread with considerable willpower

Margareta Sandhofer

The Swiss entrepreneur Hubert Looser has collected art for the past 50 years. Initially he mainly collected works by Swiss artists including Kurt Seligmann, Serge Brignoni and André Thomkins, but later his interest in these surrealistic trends shifted to Abstract Expressionism and Arte Povera.

In his collection, Looser focuses on an “extended field of experience”. His endeavour to position the individual works in a dialogue is also reflected in the exhibition currently shown at the Bank Austria Kunstforum. Lucio Fontana’s bronze sculpture “Concetto Spaziale, Natura Nr. 7” is juxtaposed with Günther Uecker’s “Weißer Schrei” (White Scream). Positioned opposite – in accordance with the colour used in the other two works - is Anselm Kiefer’s “Weiße Vlies” (White Fleece) providing a clear reference to the mythical depth of his presentation and the materials used – something lacking, or actually obsolete, in Uecker’s and Fontana’s work which leaves incomparably more room for imagination through their puristic, non-didactic aesthetics.

Room for imagination can also be found in Giacometti’s “Annette assise”. With a spiritualized stare directed into nothingness, that is, at the same time everything, the sculpture constitutes an energetic resistance to the emptiness of its surroundings – positioned directly next to Kiefer’s powerful painting.

Carefully balanced is the compilation in the next room: Richard Serra’s “Finkle-forge” is a remarkable work made with black oil crayon on paper. Robert Ryman’s “Manager” created on canvas with white oil colour on a rust proof grounding is a pure picture experience per se that escapes any further interpretation, and Ellsworth Kelly’s “White Triangle with Black” is what it is.

In the main room of the Kunstforum, Looser’s faible for Willem de Kooning is obvious. As soon as Looser “felt the chance and the will” to acquire a stately number of paintings and bronze sculptures by de Kooning he did so. Juxtaposing these works with John Chamberlain’s car wreck sculptures is appealing. In another room, Pablo Picasso’s “Sylvette”, a portrait on sheet metal, creates a dynamic moment in the lyrical dialogue with sketches by Andy Warhol and Henri Matisse.

The compilation of works by one and the same artist does not necessarily guarantee an exciting situation – this is clearly proven in the Cy Twombly room. But maybe this has to do with time in which his works were acquired, because his fascinating paintings were then no longer on the market or unaffordable. In any case, the collection leaves the impression that it was acquired “to be on the safe side”, i.e. established names could exclude the risk connected to a bad investment. The thought that at one time or another the decision was not made based on intuitive passion but rather based on (market) experience. But who should take offence of these deliberations made by a Swiss entrepreneur? And – after all – Hubert Looser’s collection is remarkable, personal preferences are visible as a common thread - providing the collection with individuality and homogeneity.