

Il rêvait d'Afrique (He dreamt of Africa)

An exhibition in honour of Helmut Rieger (1931-2014)

Opening on 5 February from 6 pm

5 – 28 February 2015

After the passing of German artist Helmut Rieger last August, his daughter Katharina and Dominique Polad-Hardouin, in association with the gallery Van de Loo Projekte (Munich), decided to pay a tribute to him.

Polad-Hardouin gallery had the pleasure of presenting Helmut Rieger's work on several occasions, with a first personal exhibition in 2008 titled *Eros et la Mort* and later in the collective exhibition *Primitive Cabaret* (March 2013), where five artists were invited to engage in a dialogue with voodoo dolls.

Helmut Rieger moved to Bavaria at the end of WWII. His commitment among German avant-garde groups made a significant impact on the Munich art scene. Between 1957 and 1968, he co-founded and collaborated with three of the city's most influential art groups: *WIR*, *SPUR* and *GEFLECHT*. He also founded the magazines associated with these groups, whose members, inspired by Situationist artists such as G.E. Debord and A. Jorn, tried to redefine the status of painting and of the art object.

At the end of the 1960s in an environment of heated social and cultural discussions he couldn't find a common ground within the groups and moved away to focus on his personal practice.

Helmut Rieger's work presents several cycles, each characterised by a particular pictorial style and by particular concerns. These delineate a life-long evolution, despite a number of recurring themes and techniques.

"[...] Each of my artistic cycles is a facet of my worldview"

Two terrible incidents in his personal life determined a crucial awakening in his work. Twice, Rieger had a close encounter with death; these extreme experiences originated, in particular, his return to figuration. It is worth mentioning that Rieger's painting is something quite distinct from a mere mimesis of the world around him. Rather, he wants it to be like an *icon*; his paintings are built upon the images that haunt him.

Imagination is an essential tool of his creative process:

“As far as I’m concerned, I never need a model when I paint a nude, [...] it is a nude in its own right – whereas a nude based on a model is always a reference to some person or another [...]”.

His paintings explore a range of associations around a theme selected from a collective (Western) imagery, the exoticism of Africa or the great Greek or Judeo-Christian myths.

In his mythological cycles such as *Calaveras (Skulls)*, *Eros und Tod (Eros and Death)*, *Jagdszenen (Hunting Scenes)*, *Drachentöter (Dragon Killers)*, or *Orbis Pictus (Images of the World)*, Rieger represents in the form of allegories the experience of his fights against death, intertwined with childhood memories from Silesia and Bavaria and from the war, marked by the culture of the Christian Baroque and by the influence of various 20th-century artistic movements, from Expressionism to the Informal art.

The same goes for the elements that compose the works we present in this exhibition; Africa, a place he never actually visited or experienced, is an important *leitmotiv* in his work. Rieger appropriates and re-enacts African masks, especially those representing animals: panthers or exotic birds. He thereby expresses a distant land that seems to exist as a hope, a dream, an ideal paradise or the wish for a return to a paradise lost.

Most of his works are in black and white, marked by the use of industrial ink on plastic film. The technique can be seen as a continuation of the research started with the group WIR and GEFLECHT (1957-1968), when Rieger intervened on industrial elements such as salvaged sheet metal. The desired matte effect is achieved by means of this industrial ink.

The exhibition is punctuated by African statuettes, following the example of a previous exhibition devoted to his work at the Lothar Fischer Museum in Lübeck: *AFRIKA IN MIR (Africa within myself)*, 3 February - 14 April 2013).

It was his last exhibition held in Germany during his lifetime.

The press release and visual info are available at:
<http://www.polad-hardouin.com/en/press-kit/he-dreamt-africa-exhibition-honour-helmut-rieger>

Press Contact: Cecilia Matteucci
contact@polad-hardouin.com - 01 42 71 05 29 - www.polad-hardouin.com
Galerie Polad-Hardouin - 86 rue Quincampoix 75003 Paris
Tue-Sat from 11 am to 7 pm.