

Otto Muehl

October, 13th – November, 17th 2018

Opening: October 13 from 3 p.m.

Otto Muehl in the 1980's

The Otto Muehl (1925 – 2013) exhibition at the Galerie Eric Dupont opening on October 13th, which regroups paintings, drawings and silk-screen prints, is the most comprehensive solo presentation of works by the co-founder of Viennese Actionism ever given in France. The last exhibition of works by Otto Muehl in Paris dates from 2001 at the Musée de Louvre.¹

Otto Muehl was a prolific artist particularly in the domain of oil painting. This is surprising for someone whose avowed mission in the early 1960's was 'to overcome easel painting by representing its destruction process'. This iconoclastic mission took the form of "Aktionen", radical performances in Muehl's studio in collaboration with artists Adolf Frohner, and Hermann Nitsch. Between 1963 and 1971, thirty-three 'Materialaktion' have been documented involving bondage and mock crucifixion. (*Wiener Aktionismus 1960-1971*, Hubert Klocker Ritter Verlag: Klagenfurt, 1989). In 1968, Muehl, Brus, and Oswald Wiener organised an Aktionsveranstaltung titled *Kunst und Revolution* in the University of Vienna, which caused public outcry and a scandal in the press; they were arrested and members of the group emigrated to Germany.

From 1971 onward, Muehl produced no more public actions and returned to painting. The works on display at the galerie Eric Dupont are all from the mid-1980's, a period of rupture with violent action during which Muehl painted prolifically. At antipodes with the themes of Aktionism, the artist associated this process with "la joie de vivre and a positive attitude toward giving shape to my life" (*Otto Muehl Tanz Arbeiten aus den 1980er Jahren*, Hubert Klocker, Sammlung Friedrichshof: Zurndorf 2005 p.2).

Looking at the large number of paintings and drawings from this period it is clear that not only has Muehl revised his position against the 'high art' of the post war avant-garde but he is borrowing freely and diversely from the predominant currents of Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting as well as reinterpreting his own abstract 'Materialbilder' from the early 1960s. In his screen prints, several of which will be shown in the gallery rue de Temple, he takes up pop-art but as Helmut Draxler points out:

'Less as a game played with the fake glitter of the media, but rather as its subjective appropriation, as a falsification and distortion of official images, which are dissolved in expressive colors as well as ornamental forms, always intending to reveal the pure truth about a grotesque type of personality.'

For the prints *Die Politiker-Serie*, Muehl intervened directly in the silk-screening process:

'I have tried to overcome the technical, the usual patterns, the reproduction, by practically making the screen a canvas in order to create the printing process myself... I am surprised by the way character changes even though the outline remains the same throughout. But the outline is often smothered by colour, and I can paint as I would with watercolours. Structures appear that I could never produce with a brush in an oil painting.' (Interview with Peter Sichrovsky in *Otto Muehl Politiker*, Sammlung Friedrichshof: Zurndorf and Vienna, 1989)

Other figurative works in the show include a group of watercolors depicting scenes of music making and dance. A series of pencil drawings evinces his profound filiation to a distinctly Austrian vein of Expressionism led by Kokoschka and Schiele.

Denise Wendel-Poray
October 2018

¹ *Otto Muehl Exhibitions in France:*

La peinture comme crime ou la « part maudite » de la modernité, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2001

Posséder et détruire : stratégies sexuelles dans l'art d'Occident, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2000

Les artistes face à l'histoire, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1997

L'autre – AA Commune, 4e Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon, 1997

L'art au corps, Musée d'Art Contemporain, Marseille, 1996

Hors limites, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1994