ALMINE RECH

Gregor Hildebrandt
AUF FALSCHER SEITE IN DIE FALSCHE RICHTUNG

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Few if any artists have been able to harness the power of music in their work without making a peep, as has Gregor Hildebrandt. In his latest show, 'AUF FALSCHER SEITE IN DIE FALSCHE RICHTUNG' (On the wrong side in the wrong direction), he again brings his charmed silent cacophony to London.

The show's title refers to his experience biking in London (where traffic flows in the "wrong" direction to that in Continental Europe). It is translated into the labyrinthine layout of the exhibition's entry which leads us to *Im Hof*, (2020) a self-portrait on granite of the artist on a bike wielding a gigantic paintbrush à la Don Quixote charging windmills. This is perhaps the only work in the show that is neither a collage nor has a direct connection to music—two mainstays in the artist's oeuvre.

There is a distinct Warholian bent in the shiny, glossy, pop glamour of Hildebrandt's work, but his engagement with music is the driving force. For the past 25 years, Hildebrandt has primarily created a variety of unique collages intertwined with music. "I wanted to make paintings that were like pieces of music," he explains in an interview with curator Jérôme Sans. Music is everywhere in his work, whether it is apparent—as in the actual material (vinyl records, cassette tape, video tape)—or invisible (a specially chosen tune or film recorded onto a record or tape subsequently used as the physical material for the work). In the latter, the work is "charged" with this music, almost like a mystical totem. "Memorials to different songs that are important to me... that these good songs are not forgotten..." is how Hildebrandt puts it.

In this show, we get a real taste of the range of these mute musical paintings, all carefully arranged like a mix tape or sequence on an album and named after songs or films, creating a private soundtrack in our minds. Visible from the street and the first to greet the visitor upon entering is the arresting *D'Amore* (2023), after Dino Risi's film, *Fantasma D'Amore,* a dramatic organic black tangle of strips of VHS tape mounted onto canvas. Leading us deeper into the heart of the show is an installation of two walls made of columns of warped blue vinyl records—a kind of pop Brancusi—and pairs of positive and negative "rip-off" tape paintings made in Hildebrandt's trademark technique of specially recorded cassette tape (a dub of a song from an original recording repeated to the required physical length of audiotape) applied onto canvas. (After the tape is applied onto a canvas, leaving its residue to form the first image, the tape itself is then removed—"ripped off"—and can be mounted onto a different canvas, creating an exact negative second image—almost like a silkscreened image and the silkscreen itself.)

This is crowned with another Hildebrandt invention, a collage painting that he calls a "cassette shelf" followed by a nod to Mondrian (a big jazz aficionado who named one of his most famous paintings, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*) on a canvas scaled down so that the lines are recreated with cassette tape. Finally, in the inner sanctum is the massive installation, *Die Hoffnung der Notwendigkeit* (2018) a nearly 20-meter mural of snowy white brushstrokes on glinting VHS tape which acts as a backdrop to smaller works. There are more audiotape paintings, as well as vinyl record collages like *5th Avenue* (2023) made of carefully set pieces of records with grooves reflecting light in different directions, a disarmingly pretty branch of flowers *Flore* (2023) recalling an antique mosaic (but actually taken from the Café de Flore in Paris) or *Eine Zögernde Stunde* (2022), inspired by a poem by Gottfried Benn, which mimics a stained glass window by the Hungarian-German artist and architect György Lehoczky from the house of Hildebrandt's grandmother in their native Saarland.

Last is a surprisingly pop triptych of identical audiotape paintings in three variations: *I go to the desert with you* (black on white); *I go to the mountains with you* (white on black); *I go down to the sea with you* (white on pale grey). Unusual for Hildebrandt, who rarely creates nonphotographic figurative work, this is based on a pop art drawing by illustrator Torsten Krächan, of a woman in profile smoking that is on the cover of a vinyl single called *Loop/Earth* by the Saarland group, Walking Down Brenton Road. Their subsequent album, *Loop* (1993) was never released and thought lost. When it was found, the group, in the spirit of collaboration, designed the cover after Hildebrandt's triptych, and the record was released on the occasion of his show at the Kunsthalle Praha in 2022.

Though the works are seemingly hard-edged—minimalist, graphic, glittering, synthetic—a feeling of warmth and emotion somehow comes through, like the warmth of the sound from a vinyl record, possibly through Hildebrandt's passion for what is infused in the material and what the material was intended to be used for—music. As he explains: "Without the particular content recorded on the tape, it's likely the cassette wouldn't interest me very much as material…the contents remain."

— Young Kim, writer