ALMINE RECH

Gregor Hildebrandt
In weißen Sträußen ließ den Duft der Sterne schneien

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Almine Rech Gallery is pleased to present the first solo exhibition by Berlin artist Gregor Hildebrandt at its London space, and the artist's fifth solo with the gallery. The show is comprised of new canvases, photographs, works in granite and sculptures.

In weißen Sträußen ließ den Duft der Sterne schneien, which lends the exhibition its title, is a small photograph depicting an out-of-focus reflection of an opulent flower bouquet in a narrow vase, reflected in a canvas covered with black VHS tape ribbon. The title comes from the German translation of *Apparition*, an 1862 poem by the symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé, that offers a yearning description of an evening encounter and ends with the words "Neiger de blancs bouquets d'étoiles parfumées" ["Snow-white clusters of perfumed stars"]. Music, which plays a central role in Hildebrandt's practice, is as disembodied as the fragrance of the stars, caught in white bouquets. Music is especially connected to his paintings. Here, the artist records a chosen piece of music on cassette tape ribbon which he then glues onto canvas, using the data storage medium as an artistic medium, thereby reducing it to its very surface. Although formally reduced and rigorous, Hildebrandt's works are nonetheless charged and personal in terms of content. Paintings, photographs, sculptures and installations refer not just to selections of music, but also to texts, films, and motifs from art history and popular culture that have influenced or inspired him. Only *Der weiße Spiegel* turns the viewer back on him/herself. Hildebrandt left the tape empty and viewers see merely themselves in the strongly reflective surface, filling the empty space through their own imaginations. Elsewhere in his pieces, artwork titles may reveal a specific reference and offer the beholders of the abstract, seemingly hermetic works, a means of access to the work's content.

It is precisely this difficult-to-grasp quality that is addressed in the song *Grundstück* by the Berlin industrial band Einstürzende Neubauten, which serves as the basis of two floral works by Hildebrandt. Both 'cassette paintings' display the same motif: a delicate, dense cluster of wild plants in front of a wall. In their delicacy, they are reminiscent of Dürer's *Das große Rasenstück* (1503). This motif is modelled after a photograph from the YouTube video of the song; using a unique rip-off process, Hildebrandt transferred the image onto the canvases: the positive *Was ich in deinen Träumen suche? (Grundstück – Einstürzende Neubauten)* thus shows black vegetation on a white background and consists of cassette ribbons on which *Grundstück* is recorded. Hildebrandt then created the negative *Bis ich deine Träume im Dunkeln Leuchten seh'... (Einstürzende Neubauten – Grundstück)* of white vegetation on a black background. The title of the positive is the first line of the song; the negative's title is the last line. The light background becomes darker towards the right, and the dark background lightens towards the right – darkness as well as the brightness of dreams is contained in these pictures. Hildebrandt's poetic appropriations stand in contrast to the rationality and clear structure of his works of art. Gluing the tape has an ordering element, both in terms of gesture and content; it is repetitive. Like an archivist of his own personal cultural history, Hildebrandt records on tape after tape, then attaches them to canvas, section by section, side by side. "I don't seek anything, I'm tidying up," Blixa Bargeld sings in *Grundstück*.

Through small variations in the way he produces his artworks, Hildebrandt creates a wide spectrum of canvases. For the large abstract triptych, the artist fashioned the surface through his choice of magnetic tape ribbons and their specific colouring, from the gradual black and white contrast of the left panel to the grey and brown tones in the middle, followed by the compact fields of the right panel with the colourful leader tape. *Es ist ein Stoppelfeld, in das ein weißer Regen fällt* is a compilation of music Hildebrandt listened to as a student, and each cassette corresponds to one song. The title is inspired by Georg Trakl's 1913 poem *De Profundis*. On the other hand, Hildebrandt's diptych *Keine Tränen für die Kreaturen des Tags und der Nacht (T)* is reminiscent of a silkscreen. While the outlines of the cassette and video tapes often provide rhythm to his works, these two canvases are covered by an irregular and clear grid; in the upper right hand corner, a sprayed 'X' stands out. Here, too, we are dealing with a positive and a negative. The white positive canvas, however, is much larger than its black counterpart, which underlines the dichotomy of negative and positive, day and night. The small surface dots come from a film of adhesive circles that Hildebrandt used to apply the tape to the canvas. In this case, it is a recording of the song *No Tears (For the creatures of the night)* by the avant-garde Californian band Tuxedomoon, yet another melancholy register in this exhibition.

The artist's ongoing series of engraved granite works stands in contrast to the reduced, abstract pieces and the dark still lifes. Hildebrandt often dedicates them to his icons. They are reminiscent of tomb slabs. The two smaller granite slabs in the exhibition are portraits of Stefan George and Georg Trakl, two pioneers of modern German poetry. The Trakl work on Labrador granite differs from the George due to the gleaming crystal flecks that are distinctive to this stone. Finally, at the rear of the gallery, there is the large granite work *Greta in Urgroßmutters Garten*, a portrait of the artist's daughter as a young girl. A cousin photographed Greta at Easter in his grandmother's garden; she holds an egg in her left hand. It is a classic half figure, as Greta turns towards the photographer and gazes pensively into the camera. In the background, coming from the bottom left corner, a dense, dark bush with a few light buds strives toward the centre of the image. A branch frames Greta's silhouette. She adds something redeeming to this exhibition that is dominated by darkness and melancholia. Like Mallarmé's apparition, she shines in an atmosphere of dusk – even if only slightly hidden.

Nele Heinevetter

Gregor Hildebrandt was born in 1974 in Bad Homburg, Germany. Recent solo exhibitions include *Jetzt und in der Stunde* (with Alicja Kwade), Hinter der Vögeln, Berlin (2014); and *Nächtliches Konzert* (with Jorinde Voigt), Museum Van Bommel van Dam, Netherlands (2012). Recent institutional group exhibitions include *One Way: Peter Marino*, Bass Museum, Miami (2014); *A history. Art, architecture, design from the 80s to now*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2014); *Man in the Mirror,* Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels (2014); *Booster – Kunst Sound Maschine*, Marta Herford, Herford (2014); *Love Story – Anne and Wolfgang Titze Collection*, Vienna (2014); *Klaus Nomi – 2013*, Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen (2013); *Gestohlene Gesten*(curated by Ludwig Seyfarth), Kunsthaus Nürnberg, Nuremberg (2013); *Landeskunstausstellung SaarART 2013,* Saarland Museum, Saarland (2013); and *Decenter, An Exhibition on the Centenary of the 1913 Armory Show*, Arbrons Arts Center, New York (2013). Gregor Hildebrandt lives and works in Berlin.