

Gregor Hildebrandt

Der Raum ist die Miete

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Almine Rech is pleased to present 'Der Raum ist die Miete' (The Room is the Rent), an exhibition of new work by Berlin artist Gregor Hildebrandt. This is his third solo show at Almine Rech Brussels—and his eighth with the gallery—featuring all new works in keeping with his oeuvre, which has consistently focused on the reinvention of analog audio and visual materials such as tape cassettes and vinyl records into mixed-media paintings, sculptures, and immersive installations.

This signature manoeuvre can be traced back to a pivotal moment in Hildebrandt's career when, in art school in 1997, he felt the inspiration to record a song by the band Einstürzende Neubauten onto tape cassette, only to unspool the tape, cut it up, and glue it into one of the conceptual notebooks with which he documented his painting process. Employing the idea that the artwork might possess a silent and invisible dimension which can only be realized in the mind of the viewer, Hildebrandt went on to produce a diverse range of works in this vein over the past two decades, including not only paintings incorporating audio tape, but also wall and floor works made out of cassettes and cassette cases, and installations of free-standing pillars and walls made out of compression-molded vinyl records.

The show begins with a fake-ceiling installation (his first ever installation of this variety) made from multi-colored vinyl EPs by the Munich-based band Paar—specifically, the album 'Hone', which was the very first release from Grzegorzki Records, the record label that Hildebrandt launched with the artist Alicja Kwade in 2018. Moving into the central exhibition space, Hildebrandt has installed white ingrain wallpaper (a textured wallpaper found in many Berlin flats), as well as an old light switch from a past apartment. Titled after a song by Tocotronic, 'Die Dinge um mich ergeben ein Muster' (The Things around me create a Pattern, 2018) situates the viewer in a sort of archetypal dream home, like a Proustian reverie triggered by some sensory association.

A variety of works hang over the ingrain wallpaper, each of them building upon earlier works from the artist's career in a different way. For instance, a small work made by applying copper elements from audio cassette tape to canvas is in fact a miniature recreation of a much larger piece in the same style, shown at Almine Rech Paris in 2017. This pattern of revisiting earlier work resonates thematically with the sampling and resampling of recording culture, and is explicitly acknowledged in Hildebrandt's 'Rip Off' series: painting works in which the artist creates both positive and negative versions of the same image. In the 'Rip Off' piece featured here, titled 'Die Tränen des Triton' (The Tears of Triton, 2019) we see a positive image of foam floating on the river Spree, capturing an arabesque pattern that is visually and conceptually echoed in a neighboring pair of paintings made from cut vinyl.

Both of these vinyl paintings see the artist deploy new motifs: one in mixed shades of blue, green and purple (titled 'Albion', 2019) is made from the same EP by Paar as the ceiling installation, and features an abstract wave motif; and another one in black (titled 'Midnight Oil', 2019), made from salvaged records, features white snaking lines dissecting an all-over grid, in homage to the artist Imi Knoebel. These works are joined by an almost completely white painting with a riot of color in one corner, which was made by covering a canvas with the beginnings and ends of cassette tape, which are always either white, transparent, or brightly colored, in distinction to the dark brown of the magnetized portion.

Moving further into the exhibition, the viewer is greeted by a series of nine views of the interior of the artist's current apartment in Berlin, from which the show takes its title, 'Der Raum ist die Miete' (The Room is the Rent). The images are printed across cassette racks, giving one the feeling of being in a time capsule from a few decades back. Viewing the works from left to right around the room, one virtually enters, circumambulates, and leaves his apartment through the artist's perspective. With a nod to Bruce Nauman and his video installation 'Mapping the studio I' (2001), Hildebrandt sheds light on the space from which his ideas emerge. One of the apartment views features an etching by Hildebrandt's mentor and inspiration, the artist and set designer Thomas Gruber, which references Marivaux's 'The Game of Love and Chance'. This image speaks to the natural evolution of an artist influenced by friends and teachers both young and old.

Hildebrandt's art defies neat categorization, in that he counterposes formally reductive artistic styles such as minimalism and abstract expressionism with a rich pastiche of personal and inter-textual references. Accordingly, references to the work of art historical heavyweights like Robert Motherwell and Fred Sandback are of equal importance to his artistic practice as the work of Thomas Gruber, and the songs of popular musicians like Portishead and Leonard Cohen carry equal weight to the music of Paar. Freely constructing his own artistic cosmology from that which surrounds him, Hildebrandt masterfully splices and reconfigures both the material and immaterial, the personal and the collective: an invitation to dance to the music that only we can hear.