

COLOGNE

Friedrich Kunath

GALERIE BQ

Two long, narrow rooms, right next to each other, both visible from the street through high windows—this was the setting of the installation by Cologne-based artist Friedrich Kunath at Galerie BQ. Although the two rooms could only be entered separately from the street, they were connected by one element: In the right-hand room, the flue pipe of a small green tiled stove went through the dividing wall and twisted around in the left-hand room. Apart from this pipe, however, the two juxtaposed spaces seemed to contain two completely different worlds.

Recent paintings by Kunath covered the entire right-hand wall of the right-hand room, which looked like the cozy living room of an older man. There were small shabby rugs on the floor, two lamps, the tiled stove, and three photographs on the wall behind the stove. The paintings, mostly watercolors on canvas, were of different sizes. Their faded colors lent them a nostalgic quality. Some of the paintings had a psychedelic look and contained phrases, such as *MAYBE NOT*, written backward. There was a slightly absurd lamp fitted with a conical lampshade that reached the floor. A sentence Kunath once read, "Sometimes darkness can give you the brightest light," inspired him to create this lighting fixture that negates its function. The actual source of light in this room was an enormous yellowish lightbulb lying on one of the rugs.

This room might have evoked childhood memories, or perhaps slightly disturbing childhood nightmares. One photograph, *Untitled*, 2007, shows an elderly man sitting quietly at a set table while in the background a barn is consumed by flames; another pictured a stranded ship and a small cuddly dog running away from it. And then there was that strange stove, and the sculpture of an enormous matchstick standing on the window ledge, whose "shadow"—actually made of charred wood—looked like another, burned-down matchstick. This was a surreal place, even if the room also provided a certain slightly stuffy comfort.

The room next door was quite different. The flue pipe twisted and turned here, dominating the space like a Minimalist sculpture. A mathematical formula that refers to the construction of the pipe covered the entire front wall. Its severity was contradicted by a bicycle built for two, its front part in good condition, its rear section rusting away, bent and twisted. Like the matchstick and its charred shadow, this object combines the contradictory and the absurd. The bicycle was leaning against a wall covered by a huge painting of an exploding sunset, creating a dreamlike and hallucinatory feeling. Kunath has described his work as "psychedelic Minimalism," a contradiction that also borders on the absurd.

But this installation was not about understanding; it was about creating personal worlds that comment on what is happening outside. "Today it is no longer possible to know everything," according to Samuel Beckett. "The link between the self and the world of objects no longer exists. . . . We have to create our own worlds in order to fulfill our need for knowledge, in order to understand, to satisfy our need for order." Maybe these two rooms, which I could well imagine as sets for a Beckett play, meant to evoke our universal need to know, albeit with an awareness that this desire can never be satisfied. The more we know, the more we slip into ignorance, into the abyss of absurdity. However, that bleak fact does not stop us, as the right-hand room of the installation showed, from creating cozy corners in the world.

—Noemi Smolik

Translated from German by Jane Brodie.

View of "Friedrich Kunath," 2007.

