



Pieter Laurens Mol, "Le Petit Déjeuner de Constantin Brancusi", 1974, chemically toned black-and-white silver gelatin prints on birchwood (fretwork), mounted on wood panel with green woolen fabric; oakwood frames (diptych), 39,2 x 31,4 cm each (frame size)

PIETER LAURENS MOL

Pieter Laurens Mol (* 1946, NL) collects and condenses information, his approach being similar to the practice of the archivist and the alchemist, but also contains combinatorial features characteristic of the Surrealists. Like a kind of filter, the artist absorbs world knowledge, exploring explanatory models from various disciplines and at times remote fields of knowledge. Mol describes his artistic practice as follows: "Sometimes I feel like a trainer who has to deal with the elements that are unfathomable and difficult to capture. My job is to tame the material."

The work of Pieter Laurens Mol thus unfolds as an incessant quest for responses to fundamental issues and concerns related to life and the organization of the surrounding universe – also in terms . During his youth, there was already a strong interest in space travel and cosmological issues, an existential curiosity which still remains at the center of his efforts to learn and understand the way the world works - a pursuit of information henceforth referred to as "spiritual space travel". His works reflect a multitude of representational models ranging from science to arts, including philosophy, mythology, physics, cosmology, semiotics, chemistry and iconography as well as the artist's own biography.

The diptych "Le Petit Déjeuner de Brancusi" (1974) consists of two tinted silver gelatin prints depicting two tower-like formations. One consists of empty egg shells stacked in an eggcup and the other of dried orange rinds on a ceramic citrus squeezer. These upright, vertical elements refer to the "Endless Column" of Brancusi.

Most of the works by Pieter Laurens Mol currently on show form a kind of cluster on the theme of individual and collective memory. The works trace the boundaries of memory and form a symbolic ensemble that encircles the inevitable fate of being forgotten. With the predominant "blackness", Mol refers to an existential basic state: the extinction of life in its material and spiritual form, the

annihilation through time, oblivion. At the same time, the deep blackness refers to the cosmic fire, from which both the big bang and the black hole emerge. Human history and the history of painting are intricately linked in these works. In the tradition of painting "black" had no intrinsic value as color, its use was considered taboo. Black is nothing more than the color that is no longer visible because it no longer reflects light rays. Black is a metaphor, a means of composition and last but not least a technical challenge. Early on, the black in paintings serves to deepen dark zones; it leads to the dark side of life and discloses the abysses of the soul. Against this backdrop, those painters known for their jet-black paintings - Goya, Manet, Frans Hals - prove to be especially fascinating for Mol.

The title of "Chronicle of Oblivion" (1988) conveys an ambiguity: "Chronicle" as an indication of something ephemeral, daily news, a kind of diary (filled with accumulated life experiences). On the other hand, forgetting is the loss of memory, the memory that evaporates over time. One stands in front of a cracked, pitch-black, painterly surface, a strange still life into which our indecisive gaze enters. One might feel the afterglow of an alchemist's workshop with the old glass funnels and band saws. The hand-blown funnels were used in the champagne industry in France and found by Mol in Reims. The vessels seem to be receptacles collecting cosmic rays and celestial energy. The works from the "Oblivion" series are equipped with instruments and suggest metaphorically that - as in alchemy - a process or a transformation of matter has taken place.

In his black works, Pieter Laurens Mol also represents a defining moment in Western history, which he sees as a kind of turning point, a kind of "great transformation", a time where old hermetic knowledge such as "Alchemy" became overruled by the "Triumph of Modern Chemistry".

It refers mainly to the beginning of the industrial revolution in the second half of the 19th century. In order to develop the heavy industry, large quantities of steel were needed. Steel production from iron ore takes place in blast furnaces, where ovens and coal are needed to heat them up. Since the combustion point of the raw coal is not high enough to melt the iron, the coal had to be converted into coke. This process of coke extraction from hard coal produces a by-product or waste called "coal tar". This substance had no economic value, at least initially. Then the engineers - in affluent Germany with its sophisticated chemical industry - discovered the benefits of the sticky black soup, from which countless products could be obtained. Chemists (for example, Bayer) began distilling aniline and other synthetic organic dyes and pigments from this otherwise useless substance.

The small-format "Memorandum" painting (1986) takes up another aspect within the same area, as Mol began to become interested in making a black painting with a material from the sky (the feathers of a flying crow) and from the earth (liquid tar from a mine) to paint. And so the paint is used to depict a condition of its own history, using the feathers as pigment and the tar as binder. In combination, feathers and tar are well known as a cruel corporal punishment dating back to the Middle Ages in Europe and applied more recently in the Wild West in America.



Timm Rautert, »Bild eins« from the series »ARTWORK« 2001, color photograph, Diasec, 109 x 152 cm, in varnished and waxed oak frame, Ed. 3 + 1 a.p.

TIMM RAUTERT

The works from the series ARTWORK by Timm Rautert (* 1941, D), that are on display, center around well-known masterpieces by Piero della Francesca, Hans Memling, Dirck van Baburen and Rembrandt. With ARTWORK, Rautert takes up his series Bildanalytische Photographie (1968-1974), in which he questions the conditions of photography and its perception.

In »ABC - from the series ARTWORK« (2001), Rautert combines his photograph of a section of the fresco by Piero della Francesca in Arezzo with the analytical examination of it. The composition is divided into single areas corresponding to the depicted figures and elements in the fresco that are outlined and labelled with A, B and C. The abstracted schematic representation emphasizes one aspect of the artwork, namely the areas on the left that have already undergone restoration as they are displayed on a screen, thus revealing a scientific, systematic view. The juxtaposition of reduced schematic representation and "actual" photography in Rautert's work illustrates the various perspectives on the fresco and allow the viewer to enter the analysis.

»Bild Eins - from the series ARTWORK« (2001) reflects a situation in the museum. The painting attributed to Dirck van Baburen "Saint Sebastian, aided by Holy Irene and Her Servant", on which the martyr's pale, lifeless body is salvaged, leans unframed against the blood-red wall of the hall. Power cables coil between the flanking passages and point to the photographer's equipment. The conditions of the photographic image meet with the conditions of presentation of the painting. With the extension of the represented subject beyond the reproduction of the painting, Rautert addresses three variants of seeing that coexist in his photography. First you recognize a painting that stands on the ground as a mere object. Here a covert glance is granted into a reality behind

the scenes of representative display of the baroque masterpiece in a museum context. At the same time, this neutral perception – induced by the absence of the complementary attributes such as lighting and framing, which further enhance the painting's greatness - implies just this expectation. The immersion into the auratically charged, pictorial illusionistic space is thus leveled out by the matter-of-fact view of the unprotected painting in a transitional situation within real space. Finally, Rautert depicts the prerequisites for his own artistic work within the framework of this moment - as it were, he himself becomes part of the picture - and thus introduces another, media-reflective level of observation. Here, the photographer does not put himself at the service of an exact reproduction of the painting, he does not succumb to the illusionary space, but instead refers to the conditions of real space that influence seeing – and, consequently, photography.

Rautert's photographic depiction of the "Portrait of a Praying Young Man" by Hans Memling ("Memling - from the series ARTWORK" 2001) is also based on capturing the form of presentation and, accordingly, the perception of the work of art. The painting stands on a pedestal, the back of the portrait – a floral still life – is seen as a mirror image.

In "Portrait - from the series ARTWORK" (2001), Rautert juxtaposes the photographic reproduction of two postcards. Both postcards contain a self-portrait of Rembrandt, on closer inspection it becomes obvious that the images are slightly different. This raises the question of the "correct" image version or the legitimacy of the reproduction of the painting. However, the difference is not caused by the reproduction but lies within the history of the original painting. Rembrandt's self-portrait was supplemented by a piece of canvas at some point in time, an intervention in the "original" that later was reversed. The images on the two postcards thus come from different points in time, documenting different states of the painting. In Rautert's photography of photography, which transfers the postcards into a monumental format and thus increases the visibility of the differences, the authenticity or liability of the statement of the medium is questioned. Rautert comments on the conventional expectation of witnessing an unadulterated reproduction, while at the same time shows that in multiplying the original, the medium of photography leads to a shift in the perception of the original.

Rautert's photographs are all surrounded by a gray background, so that the picture appears as if placed within a passe-partout, as it were. By means of this allusion, the photographic medium comes close to the framed painting.