

Flash Art

G R E N O B L E , F R A N C E

LOTHAR HEMPEL

MAGASIN

Despite a formally disparate and varied practice that jumps from one medium to another — collage, video, painting, installation, sculpture — this first retrospective of Lothar Hempel is bound together by a great sense of coherence. The works, in various media, are distributed throughout the exhibition like so many elements of theater décor: ambient lighting fixtures, mannequins and images compose scenes of a floating world. This is particularly true of works such as *Kunstschnee Will Schmilzen*, 1998. Characters in cut-out silhouettes are linked to the paintings, collages and sparse objects throughout, bringing to mind the teeming activity of Öyvind Fahlström's large installations, but in a more delicate way. However, no essential narrative ties the entire ensemble together.

History is alternatively transformed into elements of décor, as in the series of miniatures after Stella, or, in its most somber form, returns to haunt the reverie of the characters depicted herein. Perhaps the sense of coherence produced by the exhibition is that of a secret coherence, as in a dream. History alternates between a nightmare from which the viewer tries to disembroil him/herself or a gentle dream wherein refuge is found.

Oneiric associations are materialized in the collages and assemblages of forms and disparate materials, creating a grand illusion, such as the one alluded to in the collage *Plakat III (Die Grosse Illusion)*, 2006. The recurrence of images of actors and dancers transforms the visitor into an actor or a dancer him/herself, the actor of his/her own strolling itinerary. Traversing the stage, or rather that which can be called "the show," becomes analogous to the self traversed by images, figures and events: a way of expressing the idea that everything one says about human beings is false — there is nobody inside, just a passing through. It would be vain to try and further decode this strange coherence in order to appreciate it, because the exhibition engenders, by its openness, a non-artistic way of perceiving art, which is no less legitimate than a traditionally informed way of appreciation, and is one of its most winning qualities.

Vincent Pecoil

(Translated from French by Chris Sharp)



LOTHAR HEMPEL, *ABC*, 2007. Mixed media, installation view. © Magasin - Centre National d'Art Contemporain, Grenoble, France.