

*Albert Oehlen/Peppi
Bottrop: Line
Packers
at the Marciano Art
Foundation*

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Text by Keith J. Varadi



While at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Peppi Bottrop studied with Albert Oehlen, who is a specialist of pictorial unpredictability, fusing analog and digital techniques together in uncanny ways. Bottrop has essentially done the opposite over his young career, plodding along instead in the realm of color, composition, substance, and substantiality; he rarely veers from two-tone or greyscale surfaces covered with expressive, linear gestures. At the Marciano Art Foundation, a ritzy new art institution located in an old Masonic temple, the two artists relieve themselves of the master-sensei dynamic and alternatively strive towards a more balanced collaborative effort.

For *Line Packers*, Bottrop and Oehlen have constructed two unfinished planes of aluminum studs—a somewhat unfortunate trope in our very recent blogged-about art history. Nevertheless, Bottrop and Oehlen's aesthetic decision serves the exhibition, conceptually; merging on this neutral non-wall, each artist's work is given primacy. On the studs, Bottrop has mounted shards and slabs of the environment-friendly fiberboard known as Fermacell—each of which contains anti-images that he has scrawled with charcoal and an anxious confidence. Atop the Bottrops hang a small sampling of Oehlen's *Computer Paintings* (1992-2008), a semi-quizzical body of work made using a now extremely outdated Texas

Instruments laptop. Despite the rapid turnover in technology since they were produced, the works possess a focused nonchalance that has allowed them to age well into our new digitized reality.

There is something of a strange Catholicism to this pairing that is rather curious given the context of the space, as well as the Masons' relationship to the Church. The show benefits from the bold intuition that is derived from the tenuous back-and-forth between comfort and discomfort. The artists' own relationship provides comfort, while their subtle references to social and political issues elicit some amount of discomfort. As for us viewers, we are currently, collectively grappling with the repercussions of self-proclaimed populist leaders profiting off their people and a progressive pope with a Twitter account. Oehlen's mechanized pictures are nostalgic reminders for many of a more hopeful future, while Bottrop's frenetic exercises are more like metaphors for our prevailing vulnerability. Unlike members of fraternal orders, these two men seek stasis in a room of pseudo-transparent walls; but like the Catholics and the Masons, they find it in what some might consider to be rote methods.

PEPPI BOTTRUP

*LA PROGRESSION ET LA PERTE/VOORUITGANG EN
VERLIES*

4 – 26 February 2017

SALOON is delighted to present its next exhibition by German artist Peppi Bottrop. 'LA PROGRESSION ET LA PERTE/VOORUITGANG EN VERLIES' features a spatial installation, extending the abstract language of the artist as well as referring to the transition to post-industrial society.

Peppi Bottrop is known for his large graphite and charcoal drawings on different carriers like canvas and fermacell board, often directly attached to the wall. In his last exhibition at gallery Jan Kaps, his rhythmical and dense abstract language evolved towards a more focused, scattered and reduced phrasing, as if he zoomed in on his own works with a microscope. This evolution is echoed in his installation showed at SALOON. Bottrop builds a space in the space out of fermacell boards, and covers them with well-considered lines of cables and other industrial artifacts. These are marks of the artist, traces of actions, decisions and impulses.

The installation refers to the closing of the last operational coalmine in Germany. The mine Prosper-Haniel in Bottrop, the last of 150 mines in Ruhrgebiet, will shut down in 2018. It is an inescapable and necessary progression, part of the 'Energiewende' in Germany. On the other hand this transition towards a post-industrial society leaves its citizens with a yet undefined future. They face the loss of their jobs they identified with and which determined their daily lives. Once the beating heart of German economy, it became the symbol of a downfall caused by structural transformation. By building an installation that could be a fictive part of the mine, Peppi Bottrop constructs a silent witness of this rupture and transition.

The Ruhrgebiet, with his 5,1 million inhabitants on 4435 square kilometers, counted 600.000 mineworkers by the end of the fifties. Nowadays, there are about 3.900. In Prosper-Haniel, the amount of workers will shrink from about 3000 to 1000 by 2018. The coal phase-out will cost Germany up to 29,5 billion euro. Tax money will cover 21,5 billion, which will be used for subsidies and adaptation aid for the workers. From this amount, the Bundesrepublik settles the bill of 17 billion euro, whereas 4 billion will flow in from the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The rest, about 8 million euro, will be borne by RAG Kohle-Stiftung. The 'eternity costs' like mountain damage and the pumping of groundwater, counted on 6,9 billion, will also be paid by the Kohle-Stiftung. Germany has 1,6 billion to pay the pensions of the miners. The unemployment rate in this region, despite governmental measures and the efforts to modify the economical focus, is with 10,8% (2016) amongst the highest in Germany. In no other state, the poverty rate has risen so high as in North Rhine-Westphalia. One on five inhabitants of the Ruhrgebiet is considered as poor – which is about 1 million people. 40% or 300 million euro of the outgoings of the government of Oberhausen are social spending, a number that is representative for the rest of the region. 18,6% of the children in North Rhine-Westphalia are raised in a family depending on unemployment pay. In Duisburg, Dortmund oder Essen it are 30%. In Gelsenkirchen 40%.

Peppi Bottrop was born in 1986 in Bottrop, Germany. He lives and works in Düsseldorf, where he graduated as Meisterschüler at the Kunstakademie studying with Albert Oehlen and Andreas Schulze. His work has been seen in numerous solo and group exhibitions including Jan Kaps, Cologne; Kunstverein Heppenheim; Open Forum, Berlin; Museum Quadrat, Bottrop; Kunsthalle Recklinghausen.

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PEPPI BOTTRUP DER LANGE LÖFFEL

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In the works for his current show "Der lange Löffel" at Jan Kaps' Peppi Bottrop vigorously reduces the means of his drawings. He zooms into the constituents of his earlier works as if using a microscope to get closer towards the substance of the drawing itself. He simplifies the structure of his paintings and selects only the necessary to let the singular lines be what they actually are. His new lines comprise their predecessors but still find their own way of being. Mounted directly onto the walls of the exhibition space the Fermacell boards Bottrop draws on appear as architectural fragments and push his new paintings closer towards the realm of the sculptural.

This development does not contradict with the artist's earlier works, in which he would sketch up geometrical forms in a constructivist manner and fill up the void of the canvas by densifying the masses of lines. These new works are much more to be read as a logical consequence of their predecessors. They are aware of what preceded them, but leave blank what they don't need to be anymore. The artist fragments and reduces what earlier was an intertwining of cluttered strokes into loosely dispersed compositions. While cultivating the blank space, stopping his strokes and interrupting his own gestures, Bottrop finds open spaces on new grounds, makes new marks and creates novel clearances.

While he keeps testing, feeling, exploring, Peppi Bottrop drafts contradicting velocities in his drawings. He takes a fast pace, suddenly interrupts his gestures of filling up and those of leaving the surface blank and causes fragmented lines, blurred traces and stuttering signs. A mixture of beginning, interruption, restart and interruption again, enables the artist to create compositions that appear as weightless as they seem to be distinct. Concurrently Bottrop's marks seem to stem from a preliterate archaic period. They might be evocative of ancient cave drawings - signs made of soot, yet free from depiction and without characters or symbols to come about - but doing so they describe a basic human impulse.

The still visible codes printed onto the Fermacell boards during their industrial production work in the opposite direction of this archaic notion. The automatic imprints - numerical sequences from the industry - show the date and time the singular board was completed, 04.05.16 22:40, locating them in the now. While in search of the components of his drawings Bottrop responds to these codes. His strokes integrate the figures and characters. They relate to them, get dashed and cut off, as if their saturated black would only be a particularly dense line of characters, that bursts here and there to uncover the text they consist of. This way these works exist between genesis and now, between mark and image and happen both in various tenses and differing velocities.

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