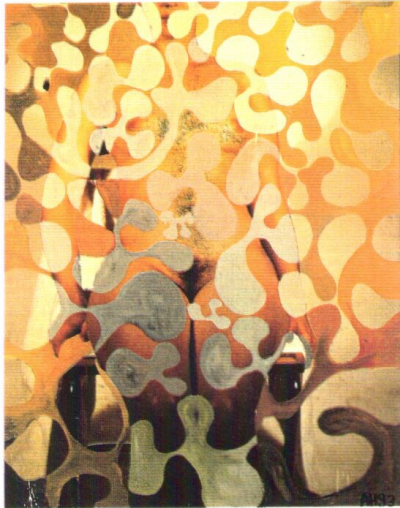


Wolf-Günther, Thiel: „Ouverture ANTON HENNING“, Flash Art, Italien,
März-April 1996

O U V E R T U R E

ANTON
HENNING

WOLF-GÜNTHER THIEL



Dorothe as Odalisque II, 1993.
Oil on cibachrome, 60 x 48".

ANTON HENNING IS a painter, although painting is just one element of his artistic vocabulary. He refers to traditional imagery and confronts it with his ultimate privacy (his kitchen, his studio, etc.). He takes traditional artistic techniques and combines them with cibachromes or digital photography. Thus he uses cibachromes like canvases: for him they are equal surfaces on which to paint. He often shoots photos of collages of paintings with photographic fragments, or arranged things like food and paints over them.

These cibachromes serve as an allusion to the hyped photography of the early nineties, covered by a rather jokey, humorous form of traditional painting. This two dimensional and bi-technical interference between photographs and painting is built into the third-dimension through sculptural elements, objects or furniture. His installations

and the individual works within them reflect his concern with the discourse of desire. The goal of desire is material reality and the transient aspects of existence, which the artist subsumes under the aspect of life in its most direct forms of expression: eating, drinking, having sex, and shitting. Eating is represented by a blood-pudding, a dish, or a lemon on Gerhard Richter's color-bases. Sexuality is symbolized by flower elements painted over hard-core pornographic images; or by a woman's breasts and nipples painted over the oven of Rosemarie Trockel. Shit represents the basic material of some of his colors.

Henning undermines the taboos and traditions of the pictorial subject by staging a sequence of surrealistic scenarios which force the viewer to pursue definable levels of meaning. His sprawling installations, seen as structures, present systems of differential re-

micro- and macrocosms.

Henning, who sees himself entirely as an acting subject, surrounds himself with discourses whose meaning originates in his own character, with its subtle humor and wit. Wit is seen as conterminous with intelligence, while humor, even when it involves nonsense, still lays stress on reason. Humor and wit are understood on various levels, much as in the work of Shakespeare. The recipients, with their different states of mind, are touched in many ways — as in Shakespeare. For example, in *Sonnet 130* Shakespeare ridicules the Petrarchan manner of praising a lady by accumulating conventional metaphors. He does so ironically, rejecting this kind of metaphor as inappropriate for a lady; but in the end this humorous — almost mischievous — sonnet turns out to be a piece of realistic, sincere and honest praise of the



Zimmer mit Aussicht (Room with a view), 1995. Cibachrome, 100 x 140".
Courtesy Wohnmaschine, Berlin.

lationships. This can be discovered in the two-dimensional artwork as well as in the elaborate ensemble of paintings and the elements of the "Gesamtkunstwerk." Every single piece can be seen for itself, but also in relation to every other piece, and it does not matter whether it is an object, a table, a chair, or an installed sculptural element. Each relates to the others and everything stands for itself. On the one hand Henning uses allegory to illustrate ideas and connections which visually link disparate things such as home-sweet-home, friendship or love represented by the portraits of friends or the garden or kitchen of his house in the northeast-German landscape. At the same time he trusts that the viewer, in the expectation of a deeper, more meaningful content, will seek out the symbolism within the work and take his images as a *pars pro toto* for his understanding of

woman he loves. We find something akin to this in Henning's work: he accumulates a body of familiar and seemingly traditional picture elements, assembling them so that, in context, they constantly achieve new, irritating and entertaining effects.

(Translated from German by Shaun Whiteside)
Wolf-Günther Thiel is a critic based in Cologne.

Anton Henning was born in 1964 in Berlin. He lives and works between Berlin and New York.

Selected solo shows: 1983: Hilger, Frankfurt; 1989: Thomas, Munich; 1990: Vrej Baghoomaian, New York; 1991: Brinkmann, Amsterdam; 1992: Robert Brown, Washington; 1993: L.O.K., New York; 1994: Weisser Elefant, Berlin; 1995: Wohnmaschine, Berlin; White Columns, New York.

Selected group shows: 1990: "Korrespondenzen," Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin; 1992: "Works on Paper," Anina Nosei, New York; 1994: "Trois Photographes Berliinois," Espace des Arts, Chalons-sur-Saone (France); 1995: "Zimmer..." Brandenburgischer Kunstverein, Potsdam; "Tendenz Abstrakt," Holtmann, Cologne.