



SIK ISEA

Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft
Institut suisse pour l'étude de l'art
Istituto svizzero di studi d'arte
Swiss Institute for Art Research



Schnyder, Jean-Frédéric, *Der Niesen (Thunersee)*, 1995, Öl auf Leinwand, 30 x 42 cm (Bildmass), Galerie Eva Presenhuber, Zürich, SCHNY28037

Documentation level

■■■■□

Name

Schnyder, Jean-Frédéric

Dates of birth and death

* 16.5.1945 Basel

Municipality of origin (CH)

Bern

Nationality

CH

Brief biography

Maler und Objektkünstler. Zeichnung und Grafik, konzeptuelle Werke, Objekte und Installationen

Fields of activity

Installation, Malerei, Grafik, Zeichnung, Objektkunst, Skulptur, Druckgrafik, Keramik, Textilkunst

Lexicon article

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder spent his youth in an orphanage in Bern. From 1962–65 he completed an apprenticeship as a photographer in Wengen. As of 1966 he produced his first works, particularly objects, in the Pop Art style. Conceptual works between 1969 and 1970. In 1969, he participated in the exhibition entitled *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Bern. From 1970 onwards, he explored oil painting. He exhibited at *documenta 5* in 1972, and at *documenta 7* in Kassel a decade later. Schnyder lived in the Engadine from 1973–75 and from 1979–1982; he then settled in Uttigen near Thun. He has lived in Zug since 1996. Key solo exhibitions: Kunsthalle Basel, 1987; Kunstmuseum Bern and Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau, 1992; Venice Biennale, 1993; Akron Art Museum, Akron (Ohio), 1995; Kunsthalle Zürich, 1998; Collection of Prints and Drawings, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, 2001; Centre

Culturel Suisse, 2004; Kunstmuseum Basel, 2007; Swiss Institute, New York, 2011.

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder's work is wide-ranging, both thematically and in terms of the media employed. In 1970, he took the decisive step away from Pop Art and conceptual art towards the ostensibly traditional medium of oil painting, thus clearly rejecting the art scene, which maintained that painting was aesthetically and politically dead. As a self-taught painter, Schnyder practised in the widest variety of expressive forms, ranging from Realism and Symbolism to abstract colour field painting. In parallel, he created a sculptural œuvre in clay, metal and wood, as well as objects such as *Empire State Building* (1971), which consists of Lego bricks, chewing gum, neon and a suitcase. He produced a series of watercolours and felt-tip pen drawings between 1971 and 1978.

Schnyder's relationship with popular humour and kitsch is often misunderstood as an ironic take on the tastes of ordinary people. Similarly superficial are the interpretations of those who wish to see his quotations of popular artistic motifs as merely poking fun at the snobbery of the art world. Schnyder's attitude is more fundamental: he identifies himself with the painter as a craftsman, while at the same time calling every style into question. It is precisely this approach that forces him to face the essential problem of what it means to paint a picture. However, Schnyder does not conduct this analysis on a theoretical level, but makes it visible in his paintings themselves.

Jean-Frédéric Schnyder frequently paints series of thematically related works. His paintings attain a conceptual character due to strict, self-imposed rules: in 1982, he created a series of 100 works entitled *Berner Veduten* (Vedute of Bern). From 1988 to 1989, he painted a railway station waiting room every day until he considered the 92-piece *Wartsäle* (Waiting rooms) series to be complete. These works were followed by countless details of landscapes seen from a bench (*Bänkli*, 1989–90), and between 1992 and 1993 he devoted himself to *Wanderung* (Hike), a cycle of paintings in which he recorded 199 views of motorways. These were then exhibited in the Swiss Pavilion at the *Venice Biennale*. By restricting himself to a specific subject – always showing the same detail and in the same format – the artist created an idiosyncratically monotonous panoramic view of Switzerland. Precisely thanks to minimal changes due to the changing seasons, for example, the work is an eye-opener. In 1998, Schnyder exhibited the series of 163 paintings entitled *Sonnenuntergang am Zugersee* (Sunset on Lake Zug), whose urban counterpart is *Baarerstrasse/Zugerstrasse*, a series of approximately 1,000 photographs taken between 1999 and 2000. In the ensuing years, he again created various series of objects, such as

Wägeli (Prams, 2004–05), constructed from 100 walnut shells, strictly arranged by size on a table, or *Zwölf Löffel* (Twelve Spoons, 2006), carved from hazel wood.

Schnyder's predilection for unspectacular places – or to the contrary for clichéd subjects – suggests an affinity with the artist duo [Fischli/Weiss](#). For Schnyder, stylistic pluralism is not a conscious decision, but the result of rigorous practice. If he dedicates himself to a subject that has already taken its place in the history of art, as is the case with *Niesen* (Mount Niesen, 1983), he will also grapple with the respective painterly tradition – in this case that of [Ferdinand Hodler](#). This approach differs from that of Schnyder's subjective paintings of the 1980s, or of his quotations from postmodernist works.

Works: Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau; Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kunstmuseum; Basel, Schaulager der Emanuel-Hoffmann-Stiftung; Kunstmuseum Bern; Bern, Stiftung Kunst Heute; Besançon, Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain; Geneva, Musée d'art moderne et contemporain (Mamco); Lausanne, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts; Kunstmuseum Luzern; Zurich, Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst.

Hans Rudolf Reust, 1998, updated 2012
Translation: Toby Alleyne-Gee

Selected bibliography

- Konrad Tobler: «Wartsaal - eine Bilderreihe von Jean-Frédéric Schnyder». In: *Kunst + Architektur in der Schweiz*, 58, 2007, 1, S. 62-65
- *Die Sammlung Toni Gerber im Kunstmuseum Bern. Zweiter Teil*, Ausst.-Kat. Kunstmuseum Bern, 28.6.-18.8.1996.
- *Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. Paintings*. Philadelphia, Moore College of Art and Design, 1994; Akron Art Museum, 1995. Texts: Jean-Christophe Ammann. Philadelphia, 1994 (The Moore International Discovery Series 2)
- *Jean-Frédéric Schnyder*. Biennale di Venezia, Schweizer Pavillon, 1993. [Schweiz. Bundesamt für Kultur, Bern (Hrsg.)]; Text: Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. Baden: Müller, 1993 [erscheint zur Ausstellung im Schweizer Pavillon anlässlich der 45. Biennale von Venedig]
- *Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. Landschaft I-XXV*. Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 1993. [Text:] Martin Hentschel. Frankfurt am Main, 1993
- *Jean-Frédéric Schnyder. Malerei 1988-1991*. Aargauer Kunsthaus Aarau, 1992. [Text:] Beat Wismer. Aarau, 1992. 4 Bde
- Patrick Frey: «Von der Schnyderischen Kunst». In: *Parkett*, 1990, 25. S. 6-17
- *Die Sammlung Toni Gerber im Kunstmuseum Bern*, mit Beitr. von Hans Christoph von Tavel, Josef Helfenstein und Christoph Schenker, Ausst.-Kat. Kunstmuseum Bern 18.6.-24.8.1986.
- *Documenta 7*. Kassel, Museum Fridericianum, 1982. Leitung: Rudi H. Fuchs [et al.]. Band 2. Kassel: D + V Paul Dierichs, 1982
- *Live in your head. When Attitudes Become Form. Works - Concepts - Processes - Situations - Information*, mit Beitr. von Harald Szemann et al., Ausst.-Kat. Kunsthalle Bern, 22.3.-27.4.1969.

Website

<https://www.presenhuber.com/artists/jean-frederic-schnyder/>

Direct link

<http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4000354&lng=en>

Last modification

05.04.2021

Disclaimer

Alle von SIKART angebotenen Inhalte stehen für den persönlichen Eigengebrauch und die wissenschaftliche Verwendung zur Verfügung.

Copyright

Das Copyright für den redaktionellen Teil, die Daten und die Datenbank von SIKART liegt allein beim Herausgeber (SIK-ISEA). Eine Vervielfältigung oder Verwendung von Dateien oder deren Bestandteilen in anderen elektronischen oder gedruckten Publikationen ist ohne ausdrückliche Zustimmung von SIK-ISEA nicht gestattet.

Empfohlene Zitierweise

AutorIn: Titel [Datum der Publikation], Quellenangabe, <URL>, Datum des Zugriffs. Beispiel: Oskar Bächtli: Hodler, Ferdinand [2008, 2011], in: SIKART Lexikon zur Kunst in der Schweiz, <http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4000055>, Zugriff vom 13.9.2012.