

## Marius Engh & Tillman Kaiser

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

Galerie Emanuel Layr



Marius Engh & Tillman Kaiser, „Selected works“ (Ausgewählte Arbeiten),  
Installation view, 2011

‘Selected works’ brought together the respective oeuvres of Marius Engh and Tillman Kaiser. Despite its deceptively simple title, the exhibition produced a harmonious alignment and a satisfying rumination about visual mysteries and their meanings. *Drunkard’s Path* (2008) – Engh’s innocuous looking domestic quilt, lying on the gallery floor – signifies more than one can know at a glance. Its title is cribbed from the use of its particular pattern in pre–Civil War America as a semaphore guiding escaped slaves along dangerous freedom trails. Slaves would embroider bed linen in different patterns and hang them in plain sight to alert other escapees of the police or militia presence. The eponymous drunkard’s path indicated that such authorities would have to be skirted in a winding fashion. Today, the pattern hardly sounds a warning but reminds its audience that decorative elements can possess functional and salvational histories.

Engh's *Manhole* (2011) is another kind of map, tracing Vienna's subterranean past. The octagonal shaped frottage – on paper mounted on aluminium – is taken from the manhole cover where 'The Third Man' walking tours -start in the city; they are organized by a local museum dedicated to Carol Reed's 1949 film noir shot in the Austrian capital. Like the quilt, the manhole lies between visibility and invisibility: recalling the post-WWII past which some prefer to forget and others want to see. Engh completes his object lessons in bad faith with *Desperate Cases and Lost Causes* (2011), which appears to be a copy of a donation box from Vienna's St. Stephen's Cathedral. 'Appears' is a relative term, as the artist might have spirited a box from the cathedral, perhaps to test the politesse of the ready-made.

Kaiser's *Hallucination Engine* (2009) has equally shady origins. The artist repeatedly visited the Tarom Romanian Air Transport head office in Vienna to ask for a copy of the airline's advertisement featuring Constantin Brâncuși's outdoor sculpture *Coloana infinitului* (Endless Column, 1938) at Târgu Jiu – only to hear his request be ritually declined. Certain that the airline doesn't own the copyright of the image of the Brâncuși work, Kaiser photographed the ad from the street through the office window and reproduced it as a large-scale triangular photograph, complete with a graphically enhanced lens flare. This reproduced reproduction made good company for Engh's works since both artists explore trafficked images in relation to a ready-made with a history. The work's title goes some way to making this point since the lens flare – reflections that result from pointing a camera directly at the sun – evokes the kind of hallucinatory imagery associated with the psychedelia of the 1960s. The constellation of the flare could be found once again in the tapered brass legs of Kaiser's bronze sculpture *Spinne* (Spider, 2011). Measuring a modest 122 cm in height, the work looks like a maquette for a monument to be used in a grander ritual.

Nocturnal processes appear in Kaiser's *Der Mond ist aufgegangen* (The moon has risen, 2011): a piece of Indian miniature cabinet making enclosed within a complex larger sculpture, which seems to double as a vitrine. The doll-like cabinet is outfitted with a large round mirror, which recalls a full moon; another round mirror embedded in the sculpture and a disk cut out of the glass vitrine create a circular motif suggesting three phases of the moon and its passage across the night sky. Guiding the audiences' visual imagination with his title, Kaiser reinforces the way he uses the lens flare as an associative motif based on reflections. Hung nearby was Engh's *Figurehead (Unknown Data)* (2010): a modest photograph of three data discs with question marks emblazoned in marker-pen on their surfaces. The discs echo with Kaiser's lunar phases while suggesting the mystery of lost information: a contemporary version of an eclipse, its edges shimmering with visibility and knowing.

—by Simon Rees

## About this review



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*by Simon Rees*

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Frieze d/e, Zehdenickerstr. 28, 10119 Berlin, Deutschland, +49 (0) 30 23626506

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