

# Tinnitus, the Loss and the Recovery of the Equilibrium – Bruno Griesel and the Rococo

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Art has always been the subject of art! Michelangelo copied ancient sculptures, Rubens paraphrased Tizian, Magritte referred to Manet in an ironical way. With true obsession Picasso repeated Cranach, whereas Arnulf Rainer obsessively painted over reproductions of Vincent van Gogh. During such an act he once even fell upon paintings of colleagues. The countless reproducers in art history reveal a lot about concepts and intentions of the producers: Peter Paul Rubens for instance tried to acquire the manner of Tizian who he admired or even adored. In contrast to this Arnulf Rainer attacked artistic artefacts – his paint-over-actions aim at the extinction of the great examples. Especially artists of the 20th century were not free of “despotism, aggression and parody” in their acquisitions; thus Arnulf Rainer is certainly not an isolated case with his attacks!

As countless artists before him, Bruno Griesel has intensively analysed history – although in his work one cannot feel any parody or aggression: Quite the reverse. Full of curiosity he has turned towards his famous colleagues from the past. In his artistic updates he seems to be driven by a certain empathy. Nevertheless, his variati-

ons and modifications of well known paintings, his paraphrases are not harmless games: The reference to art history is rooted rather in his personal story of suffering. An intensive homage to the 18th century is central to his transforming art. Rococo he calls a project which he has started in 2005 – and which in the meantime comprises numerous paintings.

The *Entrée* of Bruno Griesel’s Rococo project is the Barberini Faun, a sculpture of a drunken satyr, sleeping, which is regarded as magnum opus of Greek art in Hellenistic times. Already brought to Rome in the ancient world, the satyr served as sculpture on a fountain in the garden of a Roman villa. After it had been excavated at the Castel Sant’Angelo in the early 17th century, Barberini Pope Urban VIII had it re-erected in the Quirinal Palace. In 1820 King Ludwig I succeeded in purchasing the famous sculpture. Since 1830 the Barberini Faun has been one of the greatest attractions of the Glyptothek in Munich! Bruno Griesel has varied the ancient sculpture and has taken it into his Rococo project because he refers to a copy of the faun by Edme Bouchardon (1698 – 1762) – the greatest French sculptor of the 18th century –

which has been in the Louvre in Paris since 1892. So Griesel's work is a copy of a copy. The voluptuously swelling tendrils outside of the frame on the left are meant to intensify the reference to the Rococo Period.

The most extensive part of Griesel's project are the ballerinas, graceful figures who he has given famous horses, deer, and unicorns as quotes from art history for company. With the dancers Griesel indicates that ballet was at its height in France in the 18th century before it reached another peak in the Age of Romanticism. In ballet the 18th century found its visible symbol of the artificial which had an indispensable counterpart in the natural. Bruno Griesel's painting *Herbst (Autumn)* shows this two-sided nature of the "art of shells and scrolls" (Goethe) of the 18th century – a famous porcelain figure in Watteauesque manner. It is precious but wants to embody graceful simplicity at the same time. Griesel has fragmented and charmingly dissected a group of gardeners by Michel Victor Acier: *Gardener and Boy*. With that Griesel hints at the transitorical, at the aesthetics of transitions which constitute the art of the Rococo. Thus the style receives flow and tension, the boundaries of which are covered up in the most attractive way.

Therefore also Jean Antoine Watteau plays a special role in Griesel's project: The creator of the dreamland of Kythera like no other artist of the 18th century represents the unlimiting playground of Rococo.

Watteau's figures all come from the world of theatre. Griesel's favourite character is Watteau's Gilles. Although in his Pierrot costume he originates in the *Commedia dell'arte*, his appearance is free from any burlesque or clownish behaviour. Griesel lets his Gilles rather pose in an artistic manner. The artificial facial expression and the ballet gestures of this particular figure point out that someone is playing a role here, that transformations are acted out as performative possibilities of the individual! What is behind Griesel's occupation with the Rococo Period? The artist suffered heavily from a dysfunction of his ear. After the loss of his equilibrium he developed a tinnitus. High noises, a result of a disorder of the inner ear, sometimes made Griesel's life a mere torture. He was insecure in walking and standing with the equilibrium being lost. At this time he became interested in the ear – and in Rococo. Rococo, that was a promise of lightness and cheerfulness to the tormented, a promise of graceful beauty and elated sensuousness. The cartilage work of the Rococo Period to him was the epitome of a playful life whilst he must have felt the cartilage of his inner ear to be the source of his pain. The art of the 18th century for Griesel is dominated by pastoral and amorous scenes, it is the century of the arcadic country life and the erotic dream world. The stage of Rococo is filled with actors who play roles full of poetry and without any obligations. The

awareness of life is vacillating, the equilibrium is unstable. Full of fascination Bruno Griesel has got into the spirit of this unfamiliar world, has allowed it to charm him and carry him away in times of sorrow.

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