

Foreword (catalogue 2017)

Dr. Jutta M. Bagdahn, Art historian, December 2016, Berlin

I knew the name of the Berliner Christian Heinrich a few years before I personally got to know him. The initial one sided encounter happened in the Freiburger Gallery Meier, in which I saw an artwork that I couldn't immediately categorize. Confused at the time I looked upon an unfamiliar *sujet* with a highly aesthetic attractiveness and charm, in a rather small format. It was held in a wonderful meditative blue with a relative strongly structured surface from haptic quality. Upon closer inspection I would have loved to explore the surface with my fingertips.

I don't remember the title of the artwork any-more, but that it reminded me of the skin of an archaic reptile, so in association I named it "Blue Crocodile". Now questions really came up. e.g. Questions about the picture carrier. Was it parchment, canvas or only paper? What processes allow such surface textures to be created? Which intentions is the artist pursuing, is he an environmental activist? How could I place this hanging object, as a painting or as a collage.

In 2006 I became personally acquainted with the extremely versatile person and talented active artist Christian Heinrich, learned details of his background, of his ability and skills in general, and subtle techniques in particular. I learned everything that allowed him to become what he is today. Though many changes have taken place in his life, one thing hasn't changed, Christian Heinrich remains a loner for whom an atelier association is unthinkable. Always alone and especially at home in his Berliner atelier he places his sensory experiences of long faded fragrances, shredded memories of sounds, his journey impressions in cycles that vary themselves in certain topic circles again and again. As a painter Christian Heinrich works in a very pronounced and refined picture language, whose creative and technical elements he consistently evolves for himself.

Looking back the in 1957 born Berliner appears to have been a rather introverted child, initially less with painting and drawing, but rather fond of tinkering and handicrafts. Its even rumoured he was a predominantly non-artistic child, and that his mother at times helpfully assisted with difficult assignments for art class. Presumably as a consequence of better pedagogy in high school he was in a position to deepen his interest for art, and wake an enduring bonding. In any case it was only logical that between 1977 to 1985 he studied the history of art and archaeology (the old aunt of art history) as well as journalism at the Free University Berlin, before he began studies at the Universität der Künste Berlin (University of Art) setting the course for his artistic career. Over the years he worked interdisciplinary repeatedly together with the playwright Heiner Müller, became a Master Student of professor Herbert Kaufmann in 1986, and then from 1988 to 1991 himself an assistant professor for stage design; then the performing-art was equally of great interest and built for years a further focal point in his life.

From 1995 onward, in more or less greater intervals, study-travelling and teaching activities followed; the first lasting formative trip was 1987 to Turkey. The USA stood as his focal point from 1995 to 1998, especially the East and West Coast together with the magnificent South-West, but all that changed itself after the year 2000. Since then South Africa has a magical attraction on him, a country that according to his own remarks fascinate him to this day, in that he believes to sense his roots, always surprising him again and again, where he feels at home.

In the critical spirit of optimism of his studies Christian Heinrich followed the universal

expectation that art had to be political and the public must be aroused and alerted. Correspondingly broadly prepared and troublesome was the subject matter, that consisted in itself German Postwar History, experiments on animals and distressful environmental problematic. Mostly he cut pictures out of magazines such as Geo and Stern, joined the pieces together to form a puzzle and over painted it later with bright oil colours, so that a so called oil collage was created, a term that he first used in 1990. Yet this kind of critical realism ended where the installation stood nearer than the collage, the cloudy realization that concentrated suffering only evokes aversion and distance. The spectator was to look at and not look away, he wanted to go in new directions with attractive appealing art in the future. He turned himself from specific to non-specific, however remaining until today absolutely figurative but recognizable in his works, that frequently in abstract landscape depiction, but occasionally also dip onto amorphous forms that suggest a vague human presence. Christian Heinrich is actually a master of suggestion with a collage art per-excellence. He created collagen on a sand background, experimented in the mid 1990s with hand scooped laid paper, tissue and Japan paper, and toward the end of the decade relief collagen on wood also found their way in his repertoire.

All of Christian Heinrich travels have been formative, and he brought souvenirs back from everywhere he went. Nevertheless the greatest fascination for his most significant working material overtook him in the pulsating metropolis New York, where he found his El Dorado on Broadway in Kate's Paperie. The shop, that unfortunately today no longer exist, sold hand scooped paper from all over the world, in every variation and thickness. The paper came e.g. from South America, Asia, India and Africa with a texture variation from spiders web delicate up to high fibre and robust. So to say every piece of laid paper brings its own history, since processed rice has a different characteristic than exotic elephant manure. A souvenir brought back and stored meticulously archived in his Berliner atelier, can find utilization years later in an art work. Before the idea becomes reality coincidence and planning flow controlled in-another in a diversity of ways, processing the precious paper. The paper gets soaked, oiled, immersed in glue, submitted to different drying processes, crumpled, creased, scraped, and also scorched. This way the picture background can paper layer for layer or island like grow upwards, in a way developing relief character. Then in the next step colour is applied, as a fine old masterly glaze or as a powerful colour relief, this colour layer also underlies a further processing. In this process its scratched, scraped and smoothed again and again, the still damp parts are shoved together or stretched to the tearing point. This playing with different paper and their two dimensional surface creates a three dimensional formation with mysterious surfaces with characteristics from gentle to metallic harsh, that can be mistaken for moist or greasy.

What initially began with a wide palette of earthen beige, brown, gray tones, widened around shining yellow and orange, enlarges itself in depth with rich red tones through purple and violet as well as blue, from soft aquamarine to ink black, pure colours vary with dull dusty appearing colours. The collage African collection once more reflects the powerful naturalness of the dark continent. On the tranquil surface one believes to recognise under the vibrate African sun what appears to be wall projections, dusty road surfaces, contorted huts full of nooks and crannies in the subdued African sunlight, the intensity not the colourfulness increases.

Worldwide there are over 3000 known varieties of paper, the material basis of our knowledge and our creativity, we read, draw, paint and write on paper. Will Christian Heinrich who's works have been seen since 1987 in individual and group exhibitions in Germany and abroad, hopefully continue to accomplish the unexpected on and out of paper. May he furthermore invite us to "Vertrauten Spuren" (Familiar Paths), to Kleinen Traumreisen" (Little Dream Journeys), to "Erinnerungen an Colorado" (Recollection of

Colorado), "Manhattan" or "Vorgebirgen" (Foothills Mountains), and "Küstenlandschaften" (Coastal Landscape) as well as "Mystische Tropfsteinhölen" (Mystical Stalactite Cave), on the other hand hopefully he lets us have a part in his transformations and fundamental change, respective skinning.