

RATZ FATZ ZAUBER WAS – Fairs and Fairy Tales

A Project by Luca Beeler, Cédric Eisenring and Carmen Tobler
Kunsthalle Zürich at LISTE Art Fair
Basel, June 14–19, 2016
Opening, June 13, 5–9pm

Children's books are narratives that parents bring into their children's rooms. In this intimate setting, accompanied by the voices of loved ones, these stories are passed on. And yet, they extend beyond the protected sphere of the home and enter the social realm. Children's books carry with them a plethora of expectations and hopes: the romantic idea of the "childishly naive," education and childrearing, and the discovery of children as a utopian matter. They offer an impressive demonstration of how much these narratives form the basis for the ideals and notions of childhood and society as well as concepts of the future.

The project *RATZ FATZ ZAUBER WAS – Fairs and Fairy Tales* presents a collection of children's books from the post-war era, whose richness and delight in visual experimentation reached a peak in the 1970s. Extra copies removed from overfilled libraries, children's books that fell out of the ecstatic focus and safekeeping of collectors and enthusiasts, or picture books from children's rooms that gave way to the uninspired plans of empty nesters—all of these bear the traces of countless children's hands. Organic material soaked up by the fibers of the paper or excited scribbles on lavishly printed pictures attest to the past confrontation of these virulent stories with a generation that has long since grown up.

The printing machines that produced the books shown here were powered by the demographics in the high-birth years of the post-war economic miracle. Children's books forcefully carried the dynamics of the late 1960s into children's rooms. Here they engender states between ethereal spirituality, exemplary excesses, neo-rural technological pessimism, mystically dark fantasy, and intoxicated surrealism. Children's books conjoin applied graphic design, art, literature, and pedagogy. The project of bringing children and childhood closer to the center of the artistic and literary avant-garde encountered the reform-pedagogical efforts of the time and the pedagogical dimension of the medium to create didactics that so delicately interwove liberation and authority that the two became hard to tell apart.

The collection consists of over 200 works, which will be shown at Druckwerk Warteck during LISTE Art Fair Basel. The machines in the printing workshop carry the children's books on their backs. Each of the machines stands for a different thematic area. However, the books shall not be determined by an organizing system; rather, each individual book activates the machine creatures so that they may be encountered in a wide variety of ways.

A

This machine creature carries stories about nature, agriculture, and the relationship between human activity and its environment. *Alle Jahre wieder saust der Presslufthammer nieder* [Every year the jackhammer buzzes], for example, takes a conceptually strict approach in irreconcilably confronting the deeply calming cycle of the four-seasons book with the creeping urban sprawl of the Swiss Plateau. Nature and culture seem to stand in definite contrast to one another for children—a recurring motif of these books. The picture books of the Soviet period, by contrast, delve into geological and prehistoric times—for instance, to follow the tale of Little Coal, the most beautiful of precious stones, whose stored solar energy keeps civilization running.

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B

This machine being crosses social and media boundaries and shakes the pedagogical side of the children's book with anti-authoritarian recklessness or exemplary complicity with the rebellious child, only to sometimes subtly sneak in didactics through the back door.

C

The characters in the stories of another machine creature are fragmented inhabitants of various worlds of consciousness. In *Alice und der Grosse Rote Löwe* [Alice and the Big Red Lion], living furniture carries on conversations that feverishly repeat and interconnect. Protagonists of famous children's books interfere, removed from their existence as reproductions on the walls of the children's room. The book fuses childhood's fever dreams with the dizzying repetition of serial picture production in an endless loop.

D

This machine carries on mythology and legends through time, as well as fairy tales, which, with their tightly strung morality, became a genre almost exclusively for children. However, only in a few cases did the development toward fantasy—which freed fairy tales from the didactic burdens of the Enlightenment—result in an aesthetically differentiated genre of the children's book. And when this occurred, it was primarily as stories that look for the familiar in other realities. On the other hand, the radical political alienation of fantasy, which makes the familiar appear strange, is a recurring feature of children's books of this time.

E

The books on this machine creature show the city as a habitat for children and the world of goods, the joys and curses of their consumption, or the usually vertically organized, class-political dimension of their production. *More Than One* organizes people, animals, and objects horizontally and with an awareness of the masses, into bundles, crowds, bunches, or piles. In *Linda*, a girl of the same name rushes through the puzzle picture of the run-down New York of the 1970s to greet each of its crisis-ridden inhabitants with an enthusiastic "good morning."

F

Traditional narrative structures, language, and their relationship to pictures are unsettled by this machine. *Moko Moko Moko* starts at the beginning, with the emergence of language. A round, indefinite form grows out of a horizon, and ultimately merges back into the horizon and formlessness—the book as a loop. The emergence of the form creates a sound that is described with an onomatopoeic word, which is then spoken by the parents and imitated by the child. Language is not a rigid symbolic attribution, but is carried out as an action. Passed-on conventions and the material world both shape the action of language and must continually emerge anew at all times.

Luca Beeler (*1985) lives in Zurich and works as a curator. From 2012 until 2014 he ran the art space Muda Mura Muri together with Lorenzo Bernet and Yannic Joray. Cédric Eisenring (*1983) is an artist living and working in Zurich. Carmen Tobler (*1985) is a book designer (a.o. Studio Marie Lusa) and works at Galerie Gregor Staiger in Zurich. Together they run the publishing house Bleach.

Children's books readings

Artists, art dealers, critics, curators and others – a number of special guests each day choose their favorite children book from this or their own collection and present it in a tent-like reading corner with a glass of tea (or drink).

With Dan Solbach (graphic designer, Berlin), Christian Kobald (curator / editor Spike Art Quarterly, Berlin), Mai-Thu Perret (artist, Geneva), Harry Burke (writer & Assistant Curator / Web Editor at Artists Space, New York)

- Tuesday, June 14, from 3pm

With Oskar Weiss (gallerist, Basel), Diana Campbell Betancourt (Artistic Director Samdani Art Foundation / Chief Curator Dhaka Art Summit, Mumbai), Robbie Fitzpatrick (gallerist, Los Angeles), Jacqueline Burckhardt (art historian, Zurich)

- Wednesday, June 15, from 3pm

With AA Bronson (artist, Berlin / New York), Marta Riniker Radich (artist, Rome / Geneva), Lena Henke (artist, New York)

- Thursday, June 16, from 3pm

With Pierre Leguillon (artist, Brussels), Caroline Busta (writer / Editor in chief Texte zur Kunst, Berlin), Dan Denorch (producer, Berlin), Jaqueline Uhlmann (Head of Fair Management LISTE Art Fair Basel)

- Friday, June 17, from 3pm

With Gigiotto del Vecchio (gallerist, Supportico Lopez Berlin), Gabrielle Giattino (gallerist, Bureau, New York), and others

- Saturday, June 18, from 3pm

With Vittorio Brodmann (artist, Zurich), Dario (art historian) & Aurelien (artist) & Elias (grand / son) Gamboni (Geneva), Sadie Coles (gallerist, London)

- Sunday, June 19, from 3pm

Please see the latest updates on our webpage www.kunsthallezurich.ch.
We are happy to arrange guided tours: Julia Moritz, moritz@kunsthallezurich.ch.

Press preview: Monday, June 13, 12–5pm
We gladly provide additional information and digital visual material: Michelle Akanji, akanji@kunsthallezurich.ch.

Address: LISTE Art Fair Basel, Burgweg 15, CH-4058 Basel
Opening hours: Tue-Sat 1pm–9pm, Sun 1pm–6pm

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