

PETER STAUSS — SERMON SURLA MONTAGNE (SERMON ON THE MOUNT)

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KMD — KUNSTHALLE MARCEL DUCHAMP

Place d'Armes | Quai de l'Indépendance, Cully, Switzerland | www.akmd.ch – hello@akmd.ch

Dear Caroline and Stefan,

I was greatly touched by Flaubert's tale "Un cœur simple" (A Simple Heart) and therefore decided to display a parrot at the Kunsthalle Marcel Duchamp. You probably know the story. It is about a servant girl called Félicité who leads a simple life and unselfishly looks after her mistress. In the course of her life she loses several beloved individuals in succession—her fiancée who leaves her, her mistress's children who grow up, a young man among her relatives who never returns from a sea voyage, and finally a sick old man after she has been caring for him.

She is then given a parrot by a nobleman who has spent some time in America as a consul. Her parrot learns to imitate a few sentences and also some everyday noises. After a while Félicité gets to the point where she can only hear her parrot, whose chatter suddenly stops being a mere imitation of the human voice and turns into a genuine revelation for her. The parrot eventually dies and Félicité has it stuffed. From this moment on she says her prayers in the presence of her parrot whom she venerates as though it were the Holy Spirit. And when she finally faces death herself, she believes that she can see a huge parrot hovering over her. So the animal has become divine to her.

I am very much interested in this metaphor of a parrot as a way of approaching the art of painting. I mainly want to focus on one question, which is impossible to answer when we look at a painting: whether it is a parrot-like imitation or whether we interact with it and it speaks to us from within itself.

The problem is particularly obvious if the special appeal of a painting verges on religious revelation. We are of course highly familiar with this way of reading a painting, and we know that many dubious concepts can be derived from it. It is true that creativity, originality, inspiration, etc. are attributions that primarily characterize a specific artistic subject. But even the art of painting itself thus receives an autonomous status and a certain aura—a status that is almost subject-like. And it is, as it were, elevated to the level of a quasi-subject if we now demand a measure of self-critical reflection. There is a general consensus that painting should always reflect upon itself. But who or what is actually the subject of this reflection? Is it the artist who knows how to express his or her thoughts and doubts in their work, or is it the work itself that is also able to reflect its potential?

I bought a stuffed parrot—a red-lored Amazon—who sits on a branch in a perfectly horizontal position. However, I am not simply going to set up the bird in a room. Instead, it will penetrate the ceiling between two floors of the art gallery. The actual flooring will be replaced with one of my palettes. A palette is like a connecting element between the painter and the art of painting. It is the point at which the painter's subjectivity must turn into that of the painting, because something is vitally present within the latter that no longer depends on the artist's mind. Instead, it must do justice to the autonomous form of the painting.

The title of the exhibition—*Sermon on the Mount*—refers to the motif of religious revelation I mentioned earlier. After all, the Gospels are considered to be books that speak for themselves. Being God's Word, they also have some kind of subjectivity about them, so that the person presenting them becomes like a parrot.

Kind regards,
Peter



Peter Stauss was born in 1966 in Sigmaringen, Germany. 1987–89 architecture studies. 1989–95 fine art studies at the HDK Berlin. 1995 Master student in the class of Bernd Koberling. Recent solo exhibitions: *Professional Sleep*, carlier | gebauer, Berlin; *The Never-ending End*, carlier | gebauer, Berlin; *Skulpturen*, Galerie Crone, Berlin; *One Man Show*, Galerie Crone, Berlin. He lives and works in Berlin.