

Upcycling: Gallant art on cardboard

Galerie Lesmeister is showing wall pieces by Ashwan.

By Gabriele Mayer.



Scarlet Letter – one of the exhibition works. Photo: Ashwan

Regensburg. Ashwan is an alias, like a signature, that is not only present in works of Dürer and Co., but that also exists in street art. His actual name is Richard Ashcroft, he lives in Barcelona and works as a DJ on the side. His wall pieces - that's what to call the objects that are not merely to be perceived as images - are referencing music, especially the Hip-Hop-scene.

He studied art at the Art Institute of Chicago, but grew up in the industrial city of Liverpool. Once this information is introduced, it can no longer be seen as coincidental that the artist is deeply rooted in street art, with thick lines, edges and elbows that he integrates in his art clearly playing with the typical aesthetics of street art. The material he always uses as a base is cardboard, probably the most symbolic everyday object ever. Of course the context is focussed on the topics of recycling, or to be more exact, upcycling, of renaming the streets, the dirt, the remote, the sub-cultural. His displayed works at Galerie Lesmeister are gallantly reflecting and shining. Or, they are merely made of cardboard, painted white, roughened with sand, lit from the back, with a message transported through letters. A wall piece as such is the absolute eye-catcher of the exhibition. It consists of the graffiti-typical, stretched in width and intertwined letters, making up the text "I like the way you talk", which originates from the lyrics of a Malcom McLaren song.

The white color of the wall piece barely sets itself apart from the white gallery wall, which is unusual, but together these components seem so identically equal with one another, almost as if there was nothing left to be added. It also seems super light-weight, like Styrofoam, and as such, like a "quickly tagged" statement, only meant to be for this very moment. But most of all, it is an aesthetic object, in fact, giving the beholder the impression as if it was just cut out from all the trash surrounding us.

The same feeling is apparent upon looking at the other series of the exhibition. They, too, consist of cardboard, which the artist treated with oxidised copper and a rusty layer and ultimately encased them with resin. This technique and use of the resin is the reason why the artworks are reflecting and glittering in these wonderful brown, green, blue and many other hues, looking precious and seemingly conserved for eternity.

Ashwan was born in 1971. Within his high-gloss art also lies the attempt to transfigure a mood of a certain sub-cultured scene. Simultaneously, the gloss seems almost to shiny. One can like that or not. But technically it is done well. But the idea of artistic recycling is obviously way older than the objects of multiple-use rooted only in an ecological consciousness.

The exhibition at the Galerie Lesmeister runs through February 2nd.