

PRESS ARTICLES

Le Monde, 2nd of January 2006

Author: Jean-Pierre Stroobants

Collages of mysterious Karl Waldmann

When looking at the often dazzling 120 paintings from the German artist that the galerist of Brussels is presenting , the work produced by the artist is more as a novel, structured, says the galerist “like an essay on the madness of the 20th century” rather than a mystery. Nevertheless, mystery remains central to Waldmann’s work.

One knows very little about his life, save he was born in Dresden just a few years before 1900 and that he disappeared in a Russian work camp in 1958. His work was discovered thirty and one years later, at the time of the Fall of the Wall.

At the « market of the Poles » in Berlin amongst caviar, bone china, and trinkets, a nosy journalist discovered, in 1989, in a shirt out of paperboard marked “K. W.”, very beautiful collages of Constructivism inspiration. Then he began to inquire and to gather, for ten years, more works signed either with the two letters of the artist or the full name.

The first great shows started in 2000 and revealed to a larger audience a work, that is coded, strong and belongs to a such aesthetics that it projects Waldmann’s collages at the top of Constructivist and Dadaism art.

Feverished vs distrusted

More than 900 works of this barely unknown artist have been listed today. Gouaches, collages, photographic montages, and various assemblies have been gathered in Italy, in Ukraine, in Belgium, and in the United States. Those works raise fever and passion among some people – Pascal Polar is one of them. Some others, such as 'curators' are sceptical towards the work, and even suspicious. The Waldmann mystery seems to them too beautiful to be true. One doesn’t know on what their caution is based. Nevertheless, one can only be subjugated by a work, which strikingly portrays a century whose madness has also destroyed the secrete artist of Dresden.

Waldmann didn’t belong to one single school but his inspiration sources are various: collages of Karl Schwitters, photomontages of Raoul Hausmann, primitivism. –Dresden was home to an important ethnographic museum, which seems to have inspired the artist definitely. Denouncer of the rise of the Nazism, witness of the fall of Weimar and the failure of the spartakism, Waldmann, who met Rodchenko, Maïakovski and Malevitch, was witness to the Russian revolution, even though he always refused to become a propagandist. His work denounces Hitler’s delirious racism as well as the apocalypse which it would generate. His work also shows Stalin surrounded by Al Capone and Lenin, who has red lipstick on his lips and a woman, who , obviously, didn’t succeed in making him kinder.

Actresses, mythical women, Venus hottentotes, wheel women (allusion to those who should make turn the world differently). They are everywhere in Waldmann’s work, who went through the greatest pain of his life when his Russian girlfriend died with him in a Gulag. The threatening city, human grinding machines, the cinema, and the Black are the other key themes of the witness that even his family depicted, apparently, as a dangerous dissident during his whole life.

His work gives, in addition to its upsetting message, an amazing beauty, omnipresent red and black colours, blood and death colours, making it definitively timeless.

L'humanité Culture, 23rd of January 2006

Author: Maurice Ulrich

Thousand paintings of an unknown artist.

The gallery Pascal Polar exhibits the paintings of Karl Waldmann, whose collages were discovered in the aftermath of the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

It is the story of a discovery related to the history of the whole 20th century, if one might say. About Karl Waldmann, the artist, researchers don't even know if he were a 'professional' artist. Anyway, researchers know very little about him. Allegedly, he was born at the end of the 19th century in the area of Dresden in Germany, he had married a Russian and had disappeared in a work camp in the USSR at the end of the '50s. Nevertheless, his work represents about one thousand collages, that were unknown until the Fall in 1989 of the Berlin Wall. Various army objects, badges, cameras, caviar ... A nosy journalist found in an old van several papers, in a folder with the two following letters: K.W. The seller saw the journalist's excitement and brought him into a room in the suburbs of Dresden where more paintings of K. W. among various objects were stored. First part of an investigation, which was to succeed, a few years later, with the record of nearly one thousand paintings attributed to K. W. Meanwhile, one undertook to find the room of Dresden and the seller of 1989. Nevertheless, it didn't succeed because several years had passed.

The gallery Pascal Polar at Brussels shows thus a united number of works from Waldmann. Nevertheless, the gallery had to face at the same time the various questions raised by the late discovery of the work. Hoax, work performed 'afterwards'? Rather improbable. Firstly, considering the oldness of the materials that can be approximately dated and also because the artist often refers to facts in his collages and photomontages, that surely have a symbolic or political message at the time the paintings were created, but at the same time gathering so anecdotic details, that are barely known by historians themselves. The continuity of his inspiration, as well as the exceptional plastic quality of the paintings plead well for a coherent work, built by a man or a woman, well aware of the creation of his/her time and particularly of dadaism, surrealism, photomontages of Hausman or Heartfield, to whom the work is close in many ways. Why has the work then been unknown for so long? The answer goes without saying. The most well known artists in the '20s and the '30s had escaped the Nazi regime and the 'degenerated art' blame because those artists could exile when they didn't already dwell abroad. Consequently, one can easily imagine that an avant-gardism artist living in Dresden, maybe Jewish, in any case anti-nazi, had numerous reasons to remain secrete at the rise of the Nazism. Even though at the same time Germany was home to a flourishing artistic creation before the arrival of Hitler. Moreover, big Russian artists such as Maïakovski, Rodtchenko, and other avant-gardism personalities such as Schwitters stayed at Dresden. Waldmann could have come accross them, if not met them regularly. Dresden was at the time also home to an important ethnographic museum that contributed to turn a part of avant-gardism towards a form of return to primitive sources. Moreover, Dresden was also home to an hygiene museum, which presumably also fed hygienist as well as eugenics fantasies that prevailed in Germany under the Nazi regime. Worship of the body, strength, white beauty, and finally Aryan race in opposition to allegedly inferior races such as Jewish, Black, Gypsies, etc. The work of Waldmann is related to this environment. The same is true for the female image. For instance, the photomontage of a woman holding her head in her hand, while a monkey is wire netted in her belly. The monkey for Waldmann seems to represent the Nazism, the woman without head is reduced to its solely procreation function. Another painting gathers a crowd making the Nazi salute and the belly of a woman containing a foetus

carrying a swastika. As a result, each painting from Waldmann has a meaning, even though it is sometimes difficult to decipher. Apparently those works are contemporary with the rise of the Nazism. After the war they will be targeting Stalinism, propaganda images and tackle subjects such as sport, elite workmen, and the 'Soviet man'.

It is well the itinerary in the course of the first half of the 20th century of a man who shared revolutionary aspirations, undoubtedly committed, resolute anti-Nazi and then, afterwards, confronted with Stalinism. Nevertheless, one could not reduce his work to solely political messages. They often contain such messages, but at the same time they are richer, finer and also of an exceptional plastic quality, which testify the excellent ability of a creator, who remained probably in shadow for years. Doubts will last until one knows more about the artist, if one day it is possible. Anyway, the work deserves to be largely diffused and known. If Waldmann hadn't existed, he had to be invented.

The paintings of Karl Waldmann are shown both at the Gallery Pascal Polar in Brussels and on Internet, at the virtual Karl Waldmann museum. The paintings have already been shown in several exhibitions in Paris, Milan, Madrid, and Caen.

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Le Soir, 6th of December 2005

Author: Danièle Gillemont

Karl Waldmann

Karl Waldmann, top ranging actor of Russian Constructivism and Dadaism, with more than one thousand sharp politically photomontages, remains a mystery. He was born before 1900 in the area of Dresden. One has lost his trace in full cold war where researchers suppose he has been a victim of a Soviet work camp. A remote uncle, owner of his work and approached at the time of the fall of the Wall, considered him as a dangerous dissident and called him 'the madman', without telling more. But Polar has gained ground – without word play!- since the first exhibition. The interest has widened and Le Monde diplomatique of May 2005 didn't hesitate to illustrate all its pages with Karl Waldmann's collages. Allegedly, Waldmann worked between 1917 and 1957 in Dresden at the time of the avant-gardes. Later, in times of tracking and suspicion, it is more than probable that he devoted himself secretly to his hugely politically incorrect work. The pure, elliptic writing encompasses strongly poetic and boldly critical elements. The pallet, where red and black dominate on sepia background, underlines the critical and dramatic stake, which clearly distinguishes Waldmann from his pairs.

The mysterious man, who was a companion of the Russian revolution, of Maïakowski, and of the supremacists, was also witness to the return of order. Waldmann coded his compositions like rebuses, vilifying totalitarisms. The work, that refers significantly to German as well as Russian printed iconography, accounts for both impassioned and worried modernity. The woman image is omnipresent, with for instance, Heidi, fair little girl living in the mountains, Hannah, Jewish girl, all representing Hollywood prototype glamour, etc. Further subjects, such as hygiene vs. morbidity, stigmatize rotted regimes. Nevertheless, aesthetics, with an inalienable new image, triumphs and gives the work a timeless feature.

© Le Soir

The enigma Karl Waldmann

More than 900 constructivist collages of a certain Karl Waldmann. Allegedly, the artist is German, born in Dresden and deceased in a work camp in the USSR. The discovery of a completely unknown artist at the XXth century is a rare fact because it means that shows of his works never took place, that no trace remains, and that his professional colleagues and family remained dumb. Or maybe the artist himself chose, cautiously, fearlessly or for some other very personal reason, to keep the secret of his art, and even of his identity.

One can consider that the assumption is appropriated for the case of Waldmann. The story begins in 1989 when a journalist discovers a batch of photomontages in Berlin. Interested, he follows the seller to Dresden and discovers an impressive batch of collages attributed to K. W. Letters, which, according to the seller, allegedly, uncle of the 'mad' artist, mean Karl Waldmann. The paintings are of quality, the price quite ridiculous, consequently, the work is of interest. Now, the location and the seller are lost.

Some works are shown on the spot but ten years have been necessary to find a galerist who was interested in the paintings and who bought a great number of paintings. Pascal Polar, himself, carried out some research but without much success. In fact, till now, nothing is sure. Allegedly, the artist was born between 1880 and 1890 in Dresden and had disappeared, along with his wife in a work camp in the USSR in 1958. One knows obviously the inclination of some regimes to eliminate individuals as well as the whole documents related to them. The investigation goes on and historians are working on the subject. The art of Waldmann is abundant, rich, and acute when it goes of the meaning, either signed or not, on paper of that time, and generally undated. The most amazing thing, considering the various cultural ramifications, is that the paintings never were quoted by a contemporary. The isolation theory seems to be the solely plausible. Thoroughly analyses will certainly bring about some answers in the future.

Collages

The whole of the work, which is nearly composed of collages, that are created with photographies and texts cut from magazines, that is to say 1000 pieces, is related to Russian Constructivism, to primitivism shapes, to Cubism, to the Dadaist collages, and even to Surrealism. That is to say that the work only began after 1912, and even 1915-18 when those art movements spread.

Nevertheless, the quality of the work is undeniable and appears singular thanks to its analytical and critical glance at his time.

Waldmann has performed what Rodtchenko and other Russians did not : criticise the regime through avant-gardism language. He pursued on the same tone when the Nazis appeared. To discover Karl Waldmann collages. Galerie Pascal Polar, 108 ch. De Charleroi, Bruxelles. Until 4 February. From We. to Saturday. from 2 to 7 pm Reading: Karl Waldmann, 160 pp., ed. by Galerie Pascal Polar. Galerie Pascal Polar Check www.pascalpolar.be or <http://www.karlwaldmannmuseum.com>

To compare with Gustavs Klucis (1895-1938), a Letton artist inspired by Constructivism, who lives in Moscow. Interned in 1938 by Stalin, he died in a work camp.

Retrospective exhibition at the Museum of contemporary art, 2, place du Château, Strasbourg. Until 26 February. Web www.musees-strasbourg.org

Arte e Critica, 2006

Author: Arturo Schwarz

CALENDARIO TASCABILE

Little information has been gathered on the constructivist artist. His contribution to the new aesthetic has been undoubtedly of great importance. The discovery of an completely unknown artist at a time of huge communication and of globalization is a rare and odd occurrence. The story begins in 1989 at the Fall of the Berlin Wall. A journalist discovers at the market of the Poles between caviar, bone china, and various objects, about fifty collages inspired by constructivism. More than 900 pieces of works have been listed up until now. Some of the paintings have been shown at the exhibition Berlin-Berlin which took place in Strasburg in 1990, exhibition organised by the Ministère Français de la Culture. A Karl Waldmann museum was created and a monography published in 2005 (edited by Art Vox, Brussels). Afterwards, the first big retrospective took place at the Galerie Pascal Polar.

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