

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## PROJECTS: GEORG HEROLD AND MARKUS OEHLER

February 6 - March 23, 1993

The Museum of Modern Art opens its next **PROJECTS** exhibition with the first museum showing in New York of recent work by German artists Georg Herold and Markus Oehlen on February 6, 1993. Organized by Robert Storr, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture, **PROJECTS: GEORG HEROLD AND MARKUS OEHLER** features strange and inventive objects and images in a variety of mediums. The exhibition remains on view through March 23.

Herold and Oehlen are both members of what might be called the third postwar generation of artists in Germany (Joseph Beuys, for example, represents the first, Jörg Immendorf, Anselm Kiefer, Sigmar Polke, and Gerhard Richter the second). Although their backgrounds differ -- Herold grew up in the East and Oehlen in the West of a divided Germany -- they have in common an appreciation of the absurd that lends their work its disconcerting physicality and its wit. Concentrating on the recent sculpture of both artists and including paintings and wall constructions, the exhibition highlights both the similarities in their basic sensibilities and the vivid differences in their work.

The three sculptures that are the centerpiece of this exhibition include Oehlen's two untitled pieces from 1990 and Herold's single work from 1992, titled *Pfannkuchentheorie (Cluster Theory)*. The surrounding paintings and reliefs represent other dimensions of the artists' activities. In his brochure essay, Mr. Storr writes that "...Oehlen and Herold are most at ease

making things that are never at ease, and that will never put the viewer at ease either. 'Offness' is the dominant characteristic of all their work, and it is contagious though generally benign in its effects on ordinary objects and ways of looking."

Oehlen's dirigible-like objects, multicolored filaments wrapped tightly around carved styrofoam cores, have bicycle innertubes hanging around their middles and inflated automobile tires supporting them underneath. The main coiled shape shifts around its displaced central axis; its top resembling a bent finger and its broad bottom lost sight of in its unstable meeting with the tire base. These towering presences, whose bodies seem to swell and constrict like "dress-maker's dummies," invite association with familiar and human forms, yet unaccountably defy description.

Herold's large sheathed construction *Pfannkuchentheorie* is almost the antithesis of Oehlen's pneumatic tops. As Storr writes, "Whereas the former are eccentrically poised, Herold's object seems to be struggling to find its form and footing -- and clearly never will." Pieced together from raw linen and lumber, the cocoon-like sculpture, "horizontal, slack-skinned, and all elbows and knees," bears a symbolically ambiguous but physically unambiguous weight.

The surrounding paintings and reliefs represent other dimensions of the artists' activities. Oehlen uses borrowed pictures from television screens, xerox-based collages, and stylized figuration culled from the modernist lexicon to create an iconography that he stencils or draws onto patterned, stained, or color-swabbed canvas fields. More conceptual in orientation than Oehlen, Herold specializes in throw-away jokes and terse visual riddles. His

lath and stretcher-bar assemblages, incorporating such commonplace materials as bricks, buttons, socks, and wire, target art and politics.

Markus Oehlen, who was born in 1956 in Krefeld, West Germany, first trained as a draftsman before turning to the study of design at the Academy of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf (1976-81). He played drums in the rock band, *Mittagspause* (1979-83) and, from 1984 onward, concentrated on painting and sculpture. Presently he lives and works in Hamburg and Krefeld. Georg Herold, who was born in 1947 in Jena, East Germany, did not arrive in the West until 1973 after a relatively short jail term for a failed escape attempt. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich (1974-76), and the Academy of Fine Arts, Hamburg (1977-78), and lives and works in Cologne. Both artists first exhibited in 1977, and both made their first significant public mark in a 1980 show provocatively called *Finger for Germany*. Since the early 1980s, the artists have been exhibiting regularly at the Max Hetzler Gallery, Cologne.

**PROJECTS**, a series of exhibitions devoted to the work of contemporary artists, is made possible by generous grants from the Lannan Foundation, The Bohen Foundation, and The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art. The next exhibition is **PROJECTS: READYMADE IDENTITIES** (April 2 - May 18, 1993), a thematic show including recent work by six artists.

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