

INTERVIEW WITH AUSTRIAN SCULPTOR MARKUS HOFER

BY OLGA TRÖSCHER AND ELENA BURGER-SAMONOVA

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Markus Hofer

Markus Hofer (born 1977) is an Austrian sculptor, who is known for his creation sculptures, that place everyday objects in unusual context. Place, time and the choice of material are central topics of Markus Hofer. With a sharp sense of humour, that is typical for the artist's work, his objects appear irritating and challenging beholders' perception. With "A Private Reality" Exhibition, held at MARIO MAURONER CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY in Summer 2019, the artist shifted regularities and demonstrated the absurdity of everyday objects, questioning human ideas of logic.

Olga Tröscher, the Editor in Chief of Vienna Art Review, and Elena Burger-Samonova, MSc, Dipl. Coach, met the Artist Markus Hofer in his studio in Vienna.

Olga Tröscher: Markus, what is your private reality? What is the concept behind this exhibition?

Markus Hofer: The full title of the exhibition is "A Private Reality". I have been thinking about the title for a long time, because I could also say "The Private Reality" or "My private Reality", but at the end it is "A Private Reality", because it is more universal. About the idea of this exhibition was born at the end of last year. I was very busy at the beginning of this year, but I knew, I would have a time window in May. So, there was much thinking, production and, moreover, I never work just for one show: there are usually many of them, especially in May and June, there are a lot of openings, coming one after one.



Markus Hofer, "A Private Reality"

Olga: Your show is very spectacular, it occupies the whole premises of the gallery. Do you often have such large-scale exhibitions?

Markus: This year it was the biggest show for me and the most important, because it is in Vienna, which is not very often for me. I do a lot of shows, but not in Vienna. Then, there is my gallery here (Mario Mauroner Contemporary Art Gallery). It was an important situation for me, and I wanted to use it. You know, the

gallery is very big, and the artists usually make big objects for big rooms. You really start thinking bigger, if you have big space. However, my objects are normally not that big, and it was difficult for me to stay in my size in these rooms. Nevertheless, I did it at the end and it worked very well.

The story behind "A Private Reality" is that I divide reality into two: a common reality and a private reality. For example, in common reality you would say "This is a book, a chair, plates with food" — these are things, we don't have to discuss. But in private reality you can say "This is the most important book" or "This is the book I love or hate". There is personal connection, meaning, experience. These are two things exist next to each other. When I show my objects, you realize at the first moment "This is a piece of furniture", but the next second you think "OK, but something is not working the way it should be working".

Elena Burger-Samonova: Could you please give an example?

Markus: For example, I collected a lot of plates and out of them I made a big cloud. Everyone in the world would know what to do with the plates, but in my reality I made a cloud of them and it changed everything. Behind all these objects there is always a kind of humor, a joke, that makes you smile in the first second. "The cloud" was very interesting for me, because I worked as a sculptor. The clouds are one of the most shown things in art; you can see clouds in many paintings, churches, everywhere. At the same time it is very difficult to depict clouds, because a cloud is always changing its form, always moving, it is made



Markus Hofer, "A Private Reality"

of really nothing. So, for a sculptor it is difficult, because you have to make it stable, located somewhere and you have to choose a material — stone or wood, or whatever. It is like a movie, where you say "Stop!" and then, you can show a cloud. It is a good example of all the art productions, because it means, that you have to make a decision, to show "this" in "this situation". You make a selection to make one object and not to make all other possible objects. You have much more other ideas, you make sketches, drawings, but, of course, you cannot realize them all, you have to make decisions, that can change your life.

Olga: "The Cloud" was exhibited in a church, right?

Markus: In Salzburg there is the castle up on the hill, and in this castle there is a little chapel. There was made a decision to show art works from time to time in empty premises there. "The Cloud" itself came from a different project, when I asked families in a little village to give me some plates and made a cloud out of them.

Olga: What are your favorite objects from "A Private Reality" or, maybe, from other collections?

Markus: The main object was the watercolor catcher. It was positioned in such a way that, when you come into the room, there is a wall, you go around it, but there is the next one and the next, and the next. The story behind this object is that I always play with titles, names. The title of this work is "Wasserfarbe", which means "watercolor". The colors that I used were related to the Austrian time around 1820-s called Biedermeier. It was a difficult time and people were interested in having good life in their own space. Nowadays, we are so overloaded with infor-

mation and reality. Some friends of mine say, that they do not consume any news anymore, because it is too much, and they cannot handle it: they listen to some news on radio and it is enough. These people say, that their own lives should be OK and the rest is not important. On one hand, it is dangerous, but on the other, I can understand these people. So, I took the colors, that were very typical for that time — a kind of pink, turquoise and yellow to show the relation of this time, this area and the overwhelming massive information.



Markus Hofer, "Clouds"

Olga: In your art works you often combine sculpture with painting. Is it your special method?

Markus: I am interested in this thing, because it is a combination of two big spheres of art: sculpture and painting. Liquid colors belong to the area of painting. However, I take them, as an object, and, thus, I mix painting and sculpture. If you go back to the old times, for example, to Ancient Greece or to Gothic period, people in those days did not divide these things. For instance, if we think about Greek temples or Antique sculptures, they were originally all colored. Then, around 16th — 17th centuries we started creating museums, and there we started making separate rooms for paintings, sculptures, drawings, dividing these things. Now everything is mixed up again, and in my objects I also bring these things back together, like in Ancient Greece.

As to my favorite things, it is difficult to say, because behind of all these objects there are long stories and much thinking, and I cannot really highlight this or that piece. But, for example, there is one small peace with the numbers "1,1,1". We also made a big version of it in Australia in October 2019. I am working on it at the moment, so, now, this one is very important for me.

Olga: Do you have some unusual stories connected with your objects?

Markus: In 2007 there was an exhibition in "Künstlerhaus" and I made an object for it, which was very difficult for me, because I was not sure, if I can show it. I made a decision to show it, and it was even depicted on invitation cards. When people got the cards by post, I started getting many phone calls from collectors, who wanted to buy it. I said, that I do not sell it per phone, and I asked them to wait till the exhibition is open, to meet there and to discuss. At the exhibition one collector wanted to buy this object, but he said, that he would destroy the whole idea of the exhibition, if he took just this one piece out. So, the collector said, that he would take it all, the whole exhibition.

This story shows, that you never know, what one object can make. Sometimes, you have some objects, that are really appreciated immediately, and there are other objects, which you consider to be interesting, but they do not get much response at once. Sometimes, 3 months or even 2 or 3 years later, I start getting phone calls from people, who want to buy them. Or, sometimes, there is an object in your mind and you really want to have it at the exhibition, but you cannot finish, it because of lack of time or due to any other reason. You have to put at exhibition some other piece, which was not even on your mind at first, and, suddenly, it becomes the main object.

Elena: During your studies have you already felt that you were going to be a sculptor?

Markus: In my case it was even a bit earlier. I wanted to be a sculptor since I was a kid. It started approximately at the age of eight, when I made the first objects in wood carving. It was very easy to begin with to get some experience. We had an old little workshop from my grandfather in our house, there were materials, tools and I started working there. My parents did not mind it. But at the age of 14, when it was the time to decide, whether you stay at school or start working, or go to another type of educational institution, I decided to go to a special sculpting school

in Austria. It was a bit difficult for my family, because I had to leave my parents. I studied sculpting there till the age of 18, and then I entered the Academy of Fine Arts here in Vienna and studied with a well-known professor, whose name was Professor Bruno Gironcoli. He died in 2010, but he was very important for the Academy. So, I never did anything in my life, except sculpting.

Olga: What is the difference in your opinion between sculpture and painting? How do you feel it?

Markus: From my point of view, one of the main differences is, that you have one dimension in painting and three dimensions in sculpture. You have an object in your studio, and you can go around it to get a different perspective. I think, you have more possibilities to see an object, than a painting. Just making one step, sometimes you get a completely different view. However, I cannot say, that one type of art is more important, than the other. For me, they are equally interesting. I made some paintings myself, did some photography, still do a lot of drawings every day to capture my ideas. But my thinking is always about an object, I always think as a sculptor.



Markus Hofer, "A Private Reality"

Some people also say, that, for a start, painting is easier, because it is easier to sell paintings, and because sculptures need more space, more tools, more materials.

Olga: What are your relations with collectors?

Markus: At the beginning, right after studying, you do not have any galleries to work with, so far. Some collectors come to you, and they become the people, you will never forget, because they give you a start, and some of them really change your life.