

Matthias Groebel

chemical

September 13 – October 25, 2024

Schiefe Zähne is pleased to announce *chemical*, Matthias Groebel's second exhibition with the gallery.

In the late 1980s, figures and faces first appeared in Matthias Groebel's works, as he began combining photo-emulsion techniques with oil painting, preceding his now widely exhibited machine paintings. With the proliferation of pocket-sized point-and-shoot cameras, Groebel started to document his immediate surroundings. These snapshots included urban landscapes, anonymous passersby, a riled-up audience at a punk concert, as well as staged still lifes and intimate moments among friends. They capture a divided nation – economically prosperous yet culturally repressed – the mundanity of the public realm and its brewing subcultural undercurrents.

The works on view reflect and are equally a product of their historical and cultural context. Attuned to the rage and tenderness intertwined in ecstatic bodies, Groebel portrays a sense of postmodern ennui and an understanding of alternative spaces as information systems that circumvent official institutions. Made on the brink of the information age, these early works reveal Groebel's developing sensitivity to the collective psychology of an era, a theme that would later crystallise in his renowned TV paintings.

Groebel's DIY approach to media is evident in his use of homemade emulsion liquids. Leveraging skills he acquired in his day job as a pharmacist, Groebel mixed gelatin, egg whites, halogen salts and silver nitrate, following an early 20th-century recipe. His emulsions transferred photographic documents onto canvas with an almost painterly hue and grain, while gestural brushstrokes and thick layers of oil obscure or enhance the images. In this way, Groebel paints what is not explicitly seen in the photographs, perhaps an emotional aftertaste or a physical memory—adding a further sensual layer to documentary imagery.

This body of work is situated within a broader cultural moment, emerging from and reflecting countercultural youth movements across Europe. The first postmodernist generation was developing its own means of expression, negating universal truths of mass culture in favour of an exploration of the fictions and constructs that shape ideology. In Cologne, the reaction against pop culture was especially charged, with battles between avant-garde and postmodernist tendencies playing out in music and visual arts. Groebel's works reflect this tension, capturing a society in its liberatory efforts, yet shadowed by the encroaching ubiquity of commodification.

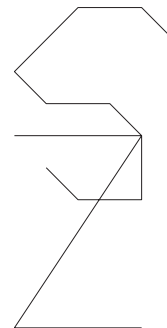
These early works offer critical insight into Groebel's evolving practice, tracing the conceptual and technical developments that have come to define his oeuvre. On the edge of technological and cultural shifts, Groebel's early images continue to resonate, recalling a time when “everything was open and nothing was fixed, pure potential and zero baggage.” (Diedrich Diederichsen, *Sexbeat, 1972 bis heute*, 2002)

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List of Works

clockwise

Room 1

Untitled, 1989

photo emulsion and oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG363)

Untitled, 1989

photo emulsion on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG373)

Untitled, 1988

photo emulsion and oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG359)

Untitled, 1989

photo emulsion and oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG371)

Room 2

Untitled, 1990

photo emulsion and toner on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG375)

Untitled, 1985

oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG376)

Untitled, 1986

photo emulsion and toner on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG372)

Untitled, 1987

photo emulsion and oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG364)

Untitled, 1987

photo emulsion and oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG358)

Untitled, 1987

photo emulsion and oil on canvas

95 x 95 cm

(MG362)