

BEN WILLIKENS

17th November 2018 – 11th Januar 2019

Opening: Saturday, 17th November 2018 at 11.30 am, speech by Katja Mittendorfer

BEN WILLIKENS (*1939 Leipzig) is a master of perspective, light and shadow. He creates paintings that explore a room's historic, social and existential dimensions.

In 1969, at the age of thirty, an illness requires an in-patient stay of almost a year. The institution's anonymity shapes the young artist. This grave crisis causes a shift in his approach of themes. A room as metaphor for the human state of mind becomes his trademark: with renaissance-like craftsmanship, deserted interiors kept strictly in grey, white and black find their way into **BEN WILLIKENS'** pictorial world. The series *Anstaltsbilder (Institution Images)* comes into being.

BEN WILLIKENS creates multiple groups of works on the subject of the historic room. In *ORTE (PLACES)* (from 1996 onwards) he visits different National Socialism's centres of power. In 1999, he creates *Räume der Moderne (Spaces of Modernity)* which stands in opposition to *ORTE (PLACES)*: the series addresses key works of Modernist architecture, interpreting Mies van der Rohe to Gerrit Rietveld and Richard Neutra. He even shows us Piet Mondrian's Paris studio (Raum 1398, Raum 1399 in this exhibition). A room as a metaphor for the human mental state par excellence, as Mondrian was known for living in a studio apartment entirely modelled after his principles of design. For the first time **BEN WILLIKENS** includes colour in his work: like the real Mondrian apartment, the canvas shows geometric forms in red, yellow and blue.

If one is familiar with Richard Neutra's life and work, **BEN WILLIKENS'** enthusiasm over the Austrian-American architect becomes intelligible. He saw "architecture as a perceptible event, becoming medicine for body, mind and soul". His style is characterised by free floor plans, sliding doors and windows, glass walls reaching from floor to ceiling and huge window surfaces, thereby appearing like a constructed realisation out of **BEN WILLIKENS'** imagery.

The combination of stringent architecture and the view from a terrace or a balcony on to overflowing nature is an absolute novelty: at 79 the artist starts a new chapter. The interest in Richard Neutra merges architecture and landscape. A perfect agglomerate is achieved: *Casa Bucerius* at Lago Maggiore, *Van der Leeuw Research House* and the *Singleton House*, both in Los Angeles are the inspiration of the eponymous works which were created shortly before the beginning of this exhibition at the artist's studio in Wallhausen near Stuttgart.

In the *Floss (Raft)* series **BEN WILLIKENS** invites us to his studio: photographs of his workplaces in Stuttgart and Wallhausen are merged with illustrations of existing works by digital print on to canvas. Using acrylic colours the artist enhances the print further, creating a unique work that oscillates between digital and analogue techniques. With a fascinatingly precise depiction of perspective the artist opens the scene and the creation of his compelling "theatre of absence" begins.

Salzburg, November 2018

Katja Mittendorfer