

Kai Althoff

Kai Althoff goes with Bernard Leach

This is Kai Althoff's first institutional show in Great Britain. He was born in 1966 in Cologne, Germany.

From the very beginning of planning this show, the artist talked of Bernard Leach and his deeply rooted love for the work of this man, extending to his writing and thought, which is intangible anyhow.

After all, Kai Althoff says, would he not have become what he is now, he would have pursued being a potter as well.

Instead, he has always been drawing and painting, making things including music – yet never a “pot proper”.

Later on, as adulthood was imposed, the work generated by him, was to be integrated into, and had to submit to (by all means) a conceptual and intellectual meandering path to follow. Which was highly praised and entertained as much as it was a luxury of thinking and spoke of liberation towards what art is or can be. Later, the same penetration of thought would reveal certain weak standing. Or the penetration as such became a stale means to cover its feebleness. If all is style and style is the content, then what? (Yes, there is something to follow, which is inevitably of huge attraction too!)

Now what is left is the content of these works, and their execution is often enough not even bothered to be probed under the tutelage of a certain intellectualism once hailed as told above. It is as if the side-paths have been overgrown and forgotten, as history tends to do.

May Kai Althoff's work benefit from this or not, the public is to say.

Often presented in environments specifically thought out for the venues of his work's surveys, he acts sparsely regarding such here, for almost economical reason.

The work will be presented in three galleries. One will be able to look closely at paintings and works on paper, ephemera and sculptural work, using all kinds of material, notably fabric, clay, cardboard and objects found.

Many have talked of the content, if figurative, of which there is a lot, as telling stories. Indeed, many stories, as he admits, are made up in the head of this man. And the work is depicting things. Really showing things everyone can understand, as they speak of the human condition, if at best, with a blandness, only a man with a deeply malignant proliferation of total faith would allow himself to employ in his work to illustrate such condition. And so it appears, that more than often Kai Althoff seems inhabited by just such faith, even if only at times of executing what is constituting the work we see of his. This Faith, the Spiritual, the beaten-up, cud-chewing folklore often detected by some in his work, is utilized to accompany him through life, as otherwise he finds it unbearable.

This ultimately turns it into objects to be used, like icons, idols, dolls, representing those absent and dead, Gods and men alike, things to look at and immerse oneself in when all words fail, imagery to worship or degrade, to help to summon all necessary to prevail. A vessel.

Bernard Leach made objects that can be all the above, as they are usable and their function quite clear, yet as they were made by a man who understood people's (including Kai Althoff's) need for all the above so much, always exceeded their mere purpose eternally. He knew the content in his case was often physical, but predestined throughout their handling, the everyday usage, they will become part of a life to such significant degree, that they will grow a soul on their own within the heart of the one to use them. And his own soul fed to them already, as of the day he made these, to merge with those to use his pots. Of course he was well aware of good Folk-art's immense power. After all, this was

first. It was always first. And he was able to judge such power like not many others.

In the third gallery on the second floor, Kai Althoff will present pots by Bernard Leach. For this purpose he had vitrines made and a cloth woven by his friend and fellow artist, Travis Josef Meinolf, upon which they will be shown. The works will include loans from such institutions as the Tate, the Victoria and Albert museum, the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, and various other most generous lenders.

As Kai Althoff says, he wishes his painting to function ideally like one of Bernard Leach's pots. There is an aching, apparent naivety to wish for such a thing. And as if to acknowledge that, the artist notes the huge difference in problems rooted in society, its collective consciousness, and so-forth, he assumes were encountered by Bernard Leach in his lifetime (trying to derive such from his writings) and those he faces himself. Yet obviously he wishes his work to be measured by the same standards, casting away the world's changes and its newborn('s) awareness. There must be a reason why he chooses to do so. I think he wants to rather go with Bernard Leach, than follow another Idol, however promising, when he seizes to understand and accept a future long begun.

F. G.M.