

MENTALSCAPES

A solo exhibition by Axel Loytved

The Hamburg artist **Axel Loytved** (*1982) shows works of the last year at Galerie Mathias Güntner; A year that was characterized by a change of mood in private as well as public space. The ubiquitous absence of people, coupled with a retreat into the private and digital, has changed the artist's working process, even though Loytved's interest in cycles of everyday materials remain evident. Thus, the starting point of the works in his new series *Mentalscapes*, in most cases, begin with an MDF wooden panel - which is often used as a base layer for posters in urban spaces. This is followed by several layers of paper, which do not lay flat and wrinkle-free like posters, but rather form elevations and depressions as accumulations of material mixed with paste turn the surface into a relief. The paper, which has now become colorless as a result of this process of artificially accelerated weathering, is next colored with various (automotive) lacquer paints. Layer by layer, the spatiality of the wall paintings is developed with the help of the colour. Thus, after many interventions and constant changes, works have slowly emerged that could be topographical maps of another world, namely due to their complex spatiality and coloring. Fittingly, the name of the series: *Mentalscapes* (a word-play by the artist), draws connotations between the process of mentally mapping spaces and the English word for landscapes. The former describes the individual perception of *place* in the form of cognitive maps, with which a subjectively perceived environment is to be made visible. This is not a true representation of spatial circumstances, but rather a depiction of personal perception. On the one hand, the latter designates a geographically comprehensible area; on the other hand, it can be used to make a reference to the important art-historical genre of landscape painting, which sees the painterly representation of a natural area. Despite this association, the works are non-objective, and in fact have little to do with classical painting - rather, the abstract forms, together with the artificial pigments, are much more reminiscent of a digital and electrically flickering surface. It is precisely this spectrum between naturalness and artificiality, between organic forms and affected colours, between utilitarian and the *art object*, that constitute the essence of Loytved's artistic practice.

The atmosphere produced by the wall works is complemented by various sculptures that become companion figures to the narrative of a seemingly alien, abstract landscape. The bronze figures are created from deformed packages that circulate around the world as part of the commodity cycle. The surface is reminiscent of the artificial patina of varnish used for the wall works. However, its mottled colour in fact comes from oxidation of the bronze surface. Next to it stands an almost room-high installation of collected branches, connected by glass fibres, suggesting an abstracted and banalized Vitruvian primitive hut – even if the toxic polyester, despite its organic appearance, represents the opposite of natural building material. A perforated trash-can, as well as a shopping basket, have been disassembled into individual parts, and stand out from the rest of the works due to their concreteness, yet simultaneously illustrate a further variation of Loytved's interventions concerned with *thingness*. Like the *Mentalscapes*, the bronze packages and the wooden constructions, the works have something everyday about them. However, without a concrete function, the works find themselves in a status of the in-between. Incidentally, it is possible to philosophize wonderfully about this state of limbo. Particularly, if one lies down, puts one's head into a cardboard box, and contemplates a star image emerging from many small holes - the last and somewhat hidden work of this exhibition lends itself to this.

Text: Anna Linder