

Volker Stelzmann / Press Release

The exhibition *Volker Stelzmann – Experimental Arrangements* focuses on the work of one of the important painters of the so called „School of Leipzig“.

The term “School of Leipzig” has its first roots in the art scene in Leipzig during the Sixties, when artists as Bernhard Heisig, Wolfgang Mattheuer and Werner Tübke studied at the Art Academy of Leipzig, the today’s “Hochschule für Graphik und Buchkunst” (Academy for the Art of Graphic and Bookmaking, “HfGuB” for short), where later they and others taught as professors. Those first generation started to retreat from the officially sanctioned “Social Realism“ and began to immerse themselves into the figurative painting tradition of the late gothic, the Renaissance and Mannerism in order to explore the relevance of the classical image canon in relationship to the realities of their time. Nevertheless, the term does not describe a certain teaching method. On the contrary the School of Leipzig shows a coexistence of a plethora of stylistic forms; primarily it was common in consideration of the inhomogeneous ‘realistic’ direction. But incorporating various styles and generations it is renowned for high artistic claim, combined with sensible social analysis and presented with highest technical mastery.

Volker Stelzmann studied from 1963 till 1968 at the HfGuB and was later appointed to a professorship in 1982. He is considered to belong to the second generation along with Arno Rink, Sighard Gille, Heinz Zander and others, while the next generation, their students, recently burst onto the international art scene and are celebrated to be “cutting edge”. But for serious discussions of this current success it is almost important to focus as well on its roots and influences.

Volker Stelzmann’s career as a painter closely echoes the emotional turmoil during the upheavals of recent German history, including the process of reunification. He is not concerned with the official, mostly vainglorious history of his country. His concern is with a quasi parallel history of the common man caught up in the violence of events, over which he has no control. The fate of the individual is the centerpiece of **Stelzmann**’s artistic vision. The *Experimental Arrangements* – actually known from the physic and chemistry instruction – is transferred by the artist on his permanent new arrangements of the human characters and behaviors.

His individual figures are part of dense crowds of people in claustrophobic, vaguely urban settings. Street scenes, carnivals, circuses, varieties and biblical locals, especially those of the Passion, are the stages, where the artist’s characters act out their allegorical roles in the *theatrum mundi*. They are connected to the narrative wealth of universal mythologies and symbolic parables, yet at the same time have a thoroughly modern feel. Attributes like stiletto shoes, miniskirts, steel helmets and trench coats signify the contemporary transposition. By painting them in the exacting style of the Renaissance masters as for example Michelangelo, the artist is able to invoke a feeling of dislocation and temporal ambiguity.

Volker Stelzmann’s work defies easy categorization. His style is eclectic and his diverse sources range from the Gothic altar pieces of Matthias Grünewald and Lucas Cranach to the daring chiascuro and figurative contortions of Jacopo Pontormo. In the modern era, the painters of the “Neue Sachlichkeit” (New Objectivity) like Otto Dix had considerable influence on **Stelzmann**’s work.

Through this exhibition we are sure to make **Volker Stelzmann**’s work accessible to a wider American audience and at the same time point out the source and progenitors of the current generation of figurative painters.