

David Böhm Jiří Franta
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bohmfrenta.net

NEVAN CONTEMPO
www.nevan.gallery
U Rajske zahrady 14
Praha 3 – Zizkov

The artistic duo comprising Jiří Franta (b. 1978) and David Böhm (b.1982) doesn't need any further introduction to the Czech public. Recently, for instance, they won several prizes for their book illustrations at the Magnesia Litera Award, and have several times been finalists in the Jindřich Chaloupecký Award. Since 2006, when they began their artistic collaboration, they have had many exhibitions both in the CR and abroad. These most often involve the search for the new contexts and semantic crossovers of traditional painting, an investigation of its physical limits, and a reflection upon the wider relationship between image and textual structure. However, the source of their prolific creativity is irrepressible and includes performance, video, spatial installations, interventions in public space and murals... as well as everything in between. This is the case with their current exhibition at Nevan Contempo, the unusual name of which comprises two punctuation marks that are usually found at the end of expressively posed questions (e.g. in comics or informal correspondence) and which serve as a clue to the perceptive viewer as to how their work, drawing light-heartedly on both traditional and new media, might be interpreted.

From the very comics-style question comprising the name of the exhibition, Franta and Böhm attract our attention and, despite a certain emotional hue, there is a large amount of pragmatism concealed in this request. The two toss aside certain theoretical problems that a regular viewer can't be bothered thinking about. It is as though they sense that art has largely become the art of attracting attention. The ubiquitous abundance of information in today's media saturated society leads to a crisis of attention, and both artists have taught themselves perfect mastery of this restricted and ever rarer resource. Instead of engaging in a frustrating and futile struggle with the fact that society sees culture mainly as a way of relaxing, Franta and Böhm attempt to use this situation to their advantage. They want to amuse and be amused. They do not create encoded riddles for experts in the sphere of luxury goods intended mainly for interior decor. Their deliberately chosen and non-conformist stance represents an important alternative to other events taking place on the art scene and as such is wholly serious and justified.

Attracting and maintaining attention is the first and decisive step. However, the question everyone has to answer for themselves is how then to reward a viewer's attention and what else is concealed beneath this ingenuity, humour, determination and attractive aesthetic. Whatever the answer, there's no way the works of Franta and Böhm can be ignored. As in the case of Krištof Kintera, an exhibition of whose work opened the Nevan Gallery at the end of last year, no explanatory manual or deep understanding of fine art and its complex history or even a knowledge of other specific contexts is necessary. The works on show reach out to the audience. They are communicative and entertaining and able to appeal to a large number of people without the artists having to resort to compromise. And so they can be understood without difficulty by people who only visit contemporary art exhibitions sporadically.

Franta and Böhm again show us what great clowns they are. They are aware of their own role, situation and possibilities and attempt to utilise and develop their potential to the full. With a sympathetic doggedness they refuse to grow up and take things seriously, and perhaps because of this their shows border on the banal (while at other times being semantically layered in a surprisingly subtle way). However, their spontaneous, heuristic approach and their joint works provoke the creativity and imagination of their viewers, whom they draw into the game in a uniquely captivating way.

At the end of the day, what's so great about being old and embarrassing anyway?!