

Dennis Cooper & Christoph von Weyhe

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Sometimes extremes call onto one another. What is too close cancels itself, what is distant provides counterpoints and incitement for thought. Such is the cohabitation in an exhibition of Dennis Cooper and Christoph von Weyhe. Dennis comes from Los Angeles and is primarily a writer. Mostly a poet, and a fiction writer known for his ability to bring extreme action into the most elaborate form, he has written extensively about and recently embraced the practice of the visual arts. First, he has been collaborating with Gisèle Vienne on a number of performances; then, with *Zac Farley* on two films; eventually, he started making animated GIFs novels. This series started with *Zac's Haunted House*, and is reminiscent of his *George Miles* cycle, from a real person he loved – named George Miles – and then shifted as Cooper turned him into an archetype of innocence and trouble. Cooper was once described as the first Internet-writer, and his novels with animated GIFs are at the same time a new branch of digital art and another way of writing, bridging the traditional gap between painting and literature. Here, literally, he writes with images; he includes technology into literature and expands the field of what is considered possible in that medium. These are films, as the images move and weave their relation to the world. They are also very humorous and dark. They seem to be novels and therefore rely on a narrative, and yet this very narrative is consistently broken and enigmatic: when words are assembled, they seem to make for a clearer meaning than images.

Christoph von Weyhe does not use Internet. I am not sure he knows what a GIF is. But for the last sixty years he has been working through his work, expanding ways of painting, developing his own technique and resetting the standards for his art. He grew up, not in Pasadena, but on the countryside of Northern Germany. Hamburg was the city he left to become a painter, in his early 20s. In the early 1980s, after turning 40, he was taken by such nostalgia for the harbor he would leave to go to Paris to become an artist, that he returned. There, on the ground of the harbor, always fascinated by the spectacle of the ships and the lights and the work, he would make gouaches, and return to his Paris studio in order to take three months, six months, sometimes a year in order to complete these exquisite paintings, where every line is a stitch onto the weaving of the canvas. He still does it today. Christoph is a complete painter, who confronts painterly interrogations: how do you abstract something from something? How do you translate emotion? How do you make painting be what Barthes said it was, the art of memory, not of reminding? His works give the very feeling of memory, every line onto them is a statement of the functioning of the brain. The persistence with which he has kept working, in secret, almost in hiding, before being able to start properly showing his work only a few years ago, is admirable.

One of the first people he showed it to, by the way, was Dennis Cooper, who, alongside other artists – notably Californian artists -, confirmed Christoph in his readiness to show what he was doing. This exhibition results from the genuine respect between artists, it is a sign of artistic complicity. Extremes call onto one another. As we see them, as we look at them, we may start to think that they are not so antagonistic the one to the other as one might have thought at first hand: that they address similar issues. Memory, perception, love, loss, time, fantasy, suggestion, sublimation, work, chief amongst them. In Dennis' view, the premise and the outcome of every great art is "charisma". I have rarely seen anything as charismatic as Christoph's paintings. What does charisma mean? I don't know. But when you see it, you know it.

Donatien Grau
(translated from French)

Dennis Cooper was born in 1953 in Pasadena, USA. He is the author of ten novels as well as numerous books of poetry and non-fiction. His books have been translated into 18 languages and are published in France by Editions POL. His 2005 novel, *The Sluts*, won the Prix Sade and the Lambda Literary Award for Best Fiction of that year. His most recent novels are *The Marbled Swarm* (Editions POL, 2016) and *I Wished* (Editions POL, forthcoming). He has directed two feature films in collaboration with artist/filmmaker Zac Farley, *Permanent Green Light* (2018) and *Like Cattle Towards Glow* (2015). He has composed four internationally acclaimed first-of-their-kind fiction books composed entirely of animated gifs, two novels — *Zac's Haunted House* (2015), *Zac's Freight Elevator* (2016) — and two collections of short works — *Zac's Control Panel* (2015), *Zac's Coral Reef* (2018), all published by Kiddiepunk Press. He has written the works of French theater director and choreographer Gisele Vienne since 2004. Among their eight-collaborative works are *Jerk* (2008), *This Is How You Will Disappear* (2010), *The Ventriloquist Convention* (2016), and, most recently, *Crowd* (2018). Cooper is additionally a widely published art critic and journalist as well as a Contributing Editor of *Artforum International Magazine*.

He lives in Paris and Los Angeles.

Christoph von Weyhe was born in 1937 in Halle (Saale), Germany where he spent most of his early childhood. Later his family moved to the north of Germany not far from Hamburg. In 1958 he enrolled at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris and graduated in 1961. since the 1960's numerous exhibitions, books and publications have been dedicated to his work. Over the past five years, Christoph von Weyhe has been invited by several artists to present his works in exhibitions: in 2015, Mike Bouchet curated a show with von Weyhe's work at the Parisa Kind gallery in Frankfurt, Germany ; in 2016, Tatiana Trouvé invited him to show works at the Johann König gallery, Berlin, Germany ; in 2019, von Weyhe was invited by Mara McCarthy to show his works alongside Pierre Guyotat's at The Box, Los Angeles. Recently, Christoph von Weyhe also collaborated with the artist Paul McCarthy on a series of works on paper. In 2016, Christoph von Weyhe had a solo exhibition at the Galerie Azzedine Alaïa in Paris. Von Weyhe's works are part of numerous institutional collections in Europe and the United States such as Fond National d'Art Contemporain, Paris, France; Musée d'art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France; Städel Museum, Frankfurt, Germany and Brant Foundation, Greenwich, CT, USA.

Christoph von Weyhe lives and works in Paris.