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For Immediate Release

Adolf Dietrich / Richard Phillips

Painting and Misappropriation

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Swiss Institute is pleased to present an exhibition pairing historical paintings by the late Swiss artist Adolf Dietrich (1877–1957, lived in Berlingen) with recent paintings by American artist Richard Phillips (1962, lives in New York). The encounter results in a complex, multi-layered dialogue beyond categorizations.

Adolf Dietrich is characterized as one of the leading Swiss painters of the 20th century and controversially also as naïve artist. Richard Phillips by contrast is a contemporary painter, who pushes the medium to its limits by choice of controversial themes, a unique painting style as well as by the sheer intensity of his gigantic compositions.

Introduced to Dietrich's work in 2003 Phillips was deeply touched by the self-consciousness of artistic manipulation of his elder colleagues' nature scenes. Phillips re-interpreted a 1939 Dietrich painting entitled "Two Squirrels in Landscape" as part of a series on national representation. With "Similar to Squirrels after A. Dietrich" Phillips introduced the Swiss painter into a contemporary discourse. By re-enacting Dietrich's painterly vision the new painting functions as a fourth-dimensional mirror. To hang the similar, yet very different canvases for the first time on one and the same wall neutralizes the act of appropriation and prompts new readings, questioning the construction of historical classification.



Left: Adolf Dietrich, Two Squirrels in Landscape, 1939, Oil on Cardboard, 24" x 17", Private Collection Switzerland.
Right: Richard Phillips, Similar to Squirrels after A. Dietrich, 2003, Oil on Canvas, 102" x 72", Courtesy Hall Collection.

To paint after Adolf Dietrich was only the beginning of Richard Phillips' ongoing involvement with the work of the Swiss artist, whom immodestly considered himself as "master painter" and proudly shared the same initials with Albrecht Dürer. For Swiss art magazine *Parkett* Phillips wrote the first English text ever on Dietrich entitled "Misappropriation: In Defense of the Real Adolf Dietrich". Phillips concludes that Dietrich has been misappropriated as naïve artist: "While it was made in a rural setting and in the midst of great hardship, Dietrich's art is still an important achievement of modern art from that time and was only, in fact, marginalized by the efforts of a few."

In recent paintings Phillips uses fragments of Dietrich's images to create dramatic offsets. The backdrop in "Message Force Multiplier" is from Dietrich's frozen lake series, a theme that the Swiss painter repeatedly painted to the point where it was seen as a statement of his own sensitivities. The symbolic reading of alienation, frozen despair, and loneliness undermines the fierce expression of the male model from a marine's recruitment ad. Phillip's painting "Libertas" re-interprets a red-clouded sky from the 1918 canvas "Abend am Untersee" that evokes the burning ruins of WW I on the German shore of Lake Constance, the waters where Dietrich spent his entire life. In the foreground we encounter the mug shot of a German double agent, Libertas Schulze-Boysen, who eventually was executed by the Nazis for her collaboration with the resistance. Phillips' two paintings are an elliptical completion of falsehood of valor, from negative to positive, from true to false, from play-acting to self-sacrifice.



Left: Richard Phillips, *Message Force Multiplier*, 2009. Oil on linen, 78 x 58 1/4 inches / Courtesy Pinnell Collection.

Right: Richard Phillips, *Libertas*, 2010. Oil on linen, 102 x 79 inches Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery, New York.

Using the words of Richard Phillips, an exhibition that does not address the critical situation of today's world becomes "paintertainment". Part of the process is to untiringly challenge the controversial potential of images. On one hand Phillips destabilizes Dietrich as a naïve painter and establishes the elder artist as a precursor to modernism, being self-aware of his compulsive, repetitive paintings. On the other hand he honors the work as being strong enough to challenge contemporary art.

The juxtaposition of "Painting and Misappropriation" is one of difference and affinity. Dietrich and Phillips share the same subjects like animals, portraits, and landscapes while both enhance figuration stylistically to a degree of artificiality that goes far beyond the depiction of reality.

Curated by Richard Phillips and Gianni Jetzer, the show will be shown in 2011 at Kunstmuseum Thurgau, Kartaue Ittingen. A catalogue will be published in June 2010 with texts by Richard Phillips, Beatrix Ruf, Gianni Jetzer, Dorothee Messmer and Markus Landert. Design by Li Inc.

For additional information or image material please contact Gianni Jetzer, jet@swissinstitute.net

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