

Press Release:

Nic Hess

Dont sorry

Exhibition runs from September 5 through October 24, 2009

**The artist will be in attendance during the opening on September 4, 2009
between 6.00 and 10.00 p.m.**

We are proud to inaugurate on Friday, September 4th at 6 p.m. the second exhibition of the Swiss artist Nic Hess (born 1968, lives in Los Angeles and Zurich). After having had single shows in the *Kunstmuseum Winterthur* (2002), in Munich's *Haus der Kunst* (2004), in the *Bevilacqua Foundation* of Venice (2006), in the *Museo de Zapopan*, Guadalajara, Mexico (2007) he has lately presented large scale installations in the *Hammer Museum* in Los Angeles and in *Ringenberg Chateau*, Hamminkeln, Germany.

Hess' expansive installation transforms the gallery space on all levels into a complex texture of signs that are related to present China and to the clichés resonating with Chinese culture. For example, Hess takes a 13 meter long reproduction of an ink drawing by the Chinese artist Hongkuan Liu (born 1938), a drawing that shows the pre-revolutionary Beijing, and collages on this image transparent foils that show photographs shot by himself in Beijing. The old town and the new town merge, the old is displaced by the new and the recklessness of the new is mirrored by the rigor with which the artist reworks the drawing. In the same time, not only new content levels, but also formal, that is, spatial levels are developed.

Another work consists of a box in which 19 bottles of Chinese mineral water are illuminated from behind. Hess has collected these bottles during a stay in Yunnan-Province. He had noticed the multiplicity of labels, hence brands and logos, for a simple product like mineral water in just one province. Inscriptions like "Purified Drinking Water", "Yunnan Top Brand" or "Fresh Drinking Mineral Water" on the labels suggest a global readability that stays in no relation to the regional character of the product.

The rhythm of the exhibition – a long line starting in the entrance area of the gallery, merging with the mineral water lightbox – continues with a relief of countless packs of cigarettes. Arranged in the form of a chevron pointing down – reminding us vaguely of the *Marlboro*-logo – while relating to the Chinese Wall and its endless ups and downs. Inflated national cultural values and Chinese natural wonders are used and thereby abused for commercial purposes. For the (non-Chinese) visitor of our show, the esthetic, minimal form stresses the cultural difference between the sign (what do the images on the packs mean) and its form (formal aspects of the packs): we do neither know nor understand the signs, naturally.

Hess became known to a larger public by working on spaces in his installations and by transforming them with his so-called wall-drawings (recently – as mentioned above - the *Hammer Museum* and in *Ringenberg Chateau*) into new, almost architecturally interfering entities. He transcends this strategy by not only drawing with adhesive tape (and by depicting thereby), but by charging objects with new content. With these sculptural objects, he

FIGGE / ROSEN

FIGGE VON ROSEN GALERIE

is again working on the architecture of the gallery space and its structural elements. For instance, he bases (visually) a black beam that is protruding through the space on the handrail of the stairs. The beam and its dynamics are taken up in a black stripe of tape that points upwards and ends in a rectangle of black tape. This rectangle belongs to the basketball basket that is installed to the right. It serves not as a goal for a ball but as a construction to hang a tarpaulin in red, blue and white that is seen on almost all construction sites in China, serving migratory workers as houses, being sold more or less whenever a cover is needed. The building boom in China, and the fast-paced, radical capitalistic economic development find its visual metaphor herein. Comparable to that artistic strategy, Mao Zedong and the marketing of his myth can be found in a citation of a Andy Warhol-painting in the form of a sleeping mask and in an empty pocketbook resembling a Mao-bible (however, in blue).

The spatial dynamic of the installation is continued in the tarpaulin that falls down to the lower level of the gallery and in the pseudo-prayer flags that are installed there. Flags that serve in Tibet for recording prayers and mantra, and that are supposed to emit positive energies and to symbolize nature elements with their colors have been co-opted by the Chinese and changed into plastic triangle flags for commercial purposes. These signs that have complex encodings for Tibetans are used by Chinese for any kind of opening of, for instance insurance agencies, car dealers, or restaurants. Their cultural and religious meaning gets lost. Hess spans a large number of these flags throughout the space and thereby narrows this space considerably. It cannot be experienced like it can in its original form.

In a wall drawing of vertical strokes of charcoal, Hess alludes to the fact that a census of population in China is barely possible. He adds to this additional reference to the masses (high quantities) in China the logo of the Chinese telecom-company CHINA UNICOM. This logo consists of a Tibetan sign for infiniteness, a symbol that has been usurped by the company and utilized for its marketing aims by stereotyping and romanticizing.

For further information and/or images, please contact the gallery.