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Kunstpreis der Deutschen
Volksbanken und Raiffeisenbanken

Bundesverband der
Deutschen Volksbanken und
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Press Release
Berlin, December 10, 2009

**Winner of blauorange 2009
Björn Braun at Kunstverein Braunschweig**

December 10, 2009–January 31, 2010
Kunstverein Braunschweig, Lessingplatz 12
www.kunstverein-bs.de

Björn Braun, this year's winner of blauorange, the art prize of the German Cooperative Banks (Volksbanken and Raiffeisenbanken), is opening an exhibition of his work at Kunstverein Braunschweig this evening. As part of the opening, Gerhard Hofmann, member of the management board of the National Association of German Cooperative Banks (BVR), will award the 20,000 euro prize to the artist. An additional component of the blauorange award, alongside the prize money and the individual exhibition, is the production of an artist's book that will be published in January 2010.

The installations and paper works shown at Kunstverein Braunschweig maintain a balance between art and nature, the natural and the artificial. The transformation of material and content is the principle that lies at the foundation of his works. In the cultural landscapes of his collages, romantic views of German sentimentality, he exclusively takes recourse to "material" that he already finds in the image.

Accordingly, nothing can be lost in Braun's work process. Anything that remains leftover must be used, and nothing can be destroyed without something new emerging. For his work *Der Waldgänger*, Braun literally dissolved Stifter's novel of the same name, a linen-bound copy from a used-books store. Boiled and made into new paper, this work still shows the color of the linen, with rough fibers, and individual letters. The detailed descriptions of nature in Stifter's prose have now been distilled into an abstract landscape.

"We are pleased to present the art prize of the German Cooperative Banks to Björn Braun, and to be able to support him in his career in a targeted way. The jury has chosen an artist who



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links nature and art in new ways, sometimes in a humorous fashion," says Gerhard Hofmann.

Sometimes Braun just has nature work for him. For a new installation now on view for the first time at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Braun had zebra finches build sleeping nests using material he provided. The nests reflect this manipulation: they glow in neon colors, or are covered with plastic snippets. But Braun's concepts cannot be used as agitprop for environmentalists, for his stories of transformation are too poetic.

A jury under the direction of Veit Loers and six representatives of German Kunstvereine chose Björn Braun for the art prize blauorange 2009. The exhibition curated by Bettina Klein will be on view at Kunstverein Braunschweig until January 31, 2010.

Downloadable visual materials from the current exhibition as well as further information can be found at www.blauorange.bvr.de.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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Björn Braun

Born in Berlin in 1979, Braun today lives and works in Karlsruhe.

Education

- 2002–2007 Kunstakademie Karlsruhe
- 2007–2008 Master class, Kunstakademie Karlsruhe,
Professor Meuser

Solo exhibitions

- 2009 Prizewinner exhibition, blauorange 2009, art prize of the
German Cooperative Banks, Kunstverein Braunschweig
- 2007 Schweizer Krankheit (Swiss Illness), Meyer Riegger,
Karlsruhe

Group shows

- 2009 Opéra Rock- Jean Luc Blanc, CAPC Musée d'art
contemporain de Bordeaux
Art contemporain, V8, Karlsruhe
- 2008 Die Hecke, V8, Karlsruhe
In unsren Herzen brennt eine Sehnsucht, Vielmetter
Projects, Berlin
Top 08, master class exhibition, Kunstverein
Heilbronn



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- 2007 Into the Woods Tonight, Parotta Contemporary, Stuttgart
Surreal, Jette Rudolph, Berlin
- 2006 Cropped, Figge von Rosen, Cologne
Von mir aus: 13 Studenten der Kunstakademie
Karlsruhe, Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe

Bibliography

Opéra Rock, CAPC Musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux (2009).
Top 08, Kunstverein Heilbronn (2008).

Kirsty Bell, "Björn Braun," *Mousse: Contemporary Art Magazine* 20
(2009), 49–52.



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Information on blauorange Art Prize

With the art prize blauorange, the German Cooperative Banks (Volksbanken and Raiffeisenbanken) are paving the way for a long-term promotion of professional creative work. In this de-centrally organized organization, which engages in numerous local and regional initiatives to support culture, blauorange represents the nationwide involvement of the financial association.

Nomination Process, Short List, Prize Money

20 artists are nominated by art professors and instructors from German art schools. These nominees are then judged by a jury consisting of six heads of German Kunstvereine and chaired by Veit Loers, the artistic director of blauorange. After the selection of candidates for the short list, the prizewinner is chosen in a second round. The prize of 20,000 euros includes a sum of 10,000 euros and an additional 10,000 euros for the production of an edition for BVR. The presentation of the works in an individual show and the publication of a catalog in the form of an artist book are additionally funded by the German Cooperative Banks.

Aim of Support

The art prize of the German Cooperative Banks was given a new concept in 2007. Formerly called "blueOrange," the prize is now called "blauorange" and is tailored to promote more intense and focused support. Supporting young artists who live in Germany is now the focus of the art prize, awarded annually. The prize is directed at artists who are in the first years of their professional careers and seeks to provide them with an impulse for their further work. In the process of selecting the prize winner, close collaboration takes place with selected German Kunstvereine on the jury as well as with professors at art academies who suggest



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candidates. Each year to choose the prizewinner, representatives are selected from different Kunstvereine and art academies. Accordingly, the prizewinner exhibition takes place each year at a different Kunstverein, thus involving various regions of Germany over the years.

blauorange 2007

Danh Vo was the winner of blauorange 2007. On the shortlist for blauorange 2007 were Asli Sungu and Claus Richter. The jury, directed by Veit Loers included Anja Casser (Badischer Kunstverein), Yilmaz Dziewior (Kunstverein in Hamburg), Gerrit Gohlke (Brandenburgischer Kunstverein Potsdam), Stefan Kalmár (Kunstverein München), Matthia Löbke (Kunstverein Heilbronn), Chus Martinez (Kunstverein Frankfurt) and Susanne Pfeffer (Kunst-Werke Berlin). The prizewinner exhibition blauorange 2007 was curated by Fanny Gonella and shown at Brandenburgischer Kunstverein (BKV) Potsdam.

blauorange 2008

Kitty Kraus was the winner of blauorange 2008. Nominated for the art prize in 2008 were the artist collective FORT (Jenny Kropp, Anna Jandt, Alberta Niemann, Claudia Heidorn), Adrian Lohmüller, Sophie Oldenbourg, and Monika Stricker. The jury, headed by Veit Loers, included Marius Babias (Neuer Berliner Kunstverein), Justin Hoffmann (Kunstverein Wolfsburg), Matthia Löbke (Kunstverein Heilbronn), Kathleen Rahn (Kunstverein Nürnberg), Christina Végh (Bonner Kunstverein) und Janneke de Vries (Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, Bremen) an. The prizewinner exhibition was curated by Bettina Klein and took place at Kunstverein Heilbronn.



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blauorange 2009

This year's winner of blauorange, the art prize of the German Cooperative Banks, is Björn Braun. Also on the short list are Marieta Chirulescu, Stephanie Kiwitt, and the artist collective Jochen Schmith. The jury, chaired by Veit Loers, included Hilke Wagner (Kunstverein Braunschweig), René Zechlin (Kunstverein Hannover), Melanie Bono (Neuer Aachener Kunstverein), Caroline Käding (Kunstverein Freiburg), Carina Plath (Westfälischer Kunstverein Münster) and Axel John Wieder (Künstlerhaus Stuttgart). The prizewinner exhibition was curated by Bettina Klein and is exhibited at Kunstverein Braunschweig through January 31, 2010.

*For more information, visit our website at:
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Participants Art Prize blauorange 2009

The donors of the prize:

Germany's ca. 1,200 Cooperative Banks (Volksbanken and Raiffeisenbanken)

Organization: National Association of Cooperative Banks (BVR), Berlin

The prize was presented by Gerhard Hofmann, member of the managing board, National Association of Cooperative Banks

Director and jury chairman, blauorange: Veit Loers

Jury blauorange 2009:

Hilke Wagner (Kunstverein Braunschweig)

René Zechlin (Kunstverein Hannover)

Melanie Bono (Neuer Aachener Kunstverein)

Caroline Käding (Kunstverein Freiburg)

Carina Plath (Westfälischer Kunstverein Münster)

Axel John Wieder (Künstlerhaus Stuttgart)

Veit Loers (director, jury chairman)

Curator, blauorange 2009: Bettina Klein

Prizewinner, blauorange 2009: Björn Braun

Shortlist: Marieta Chirulescu, Stephanie Kiwitt, Jochen Schmith

Exhibition partner, prizewinner exhibition blauorange 2009:
Kunstverein Braunschweig e. V.

Media partner: ARTE

Project coordination: Melanie Schmergal, BVR
Andrea Laube, BVR

Press contacts

Cornelia Schulz, BVR

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Nesting Aids

Bettina Klein

(from the catalogue "Nest - Björn Braun")

In the summer, I saw a nesting aid made of cord placed prominently above the entrance to a garden shed. A pair of wrens preferred instead to build their nest inside the shed in a fishing net hanging under the ceiling, rather than using the housing provided.

All the same, the adaptability of animals to their altered surroundings is quite astonishing: the remains of industrially manufactured materials, like woolen threads, cords, or plastic nets from commercial bird feeders, can often be found in bird nests, especially those built by synanthropic species like the blackbird (which as late as the nineteenth century was still considered a pure forest animal). Birds simply build their nests with whatever they find in their direct surroundings.

A half a year ago, Björn Braun purchased two zebra finches that live in a large aviary at his home. He regularly provides them with various materials that the birds then make into sleeping nests (since the two birds are male, the nests are for sleeping and not brooding). The nests that emerge in this way have the typical shape of zebra finch nests, but are so strange in terms of color and material that they could actually be considered artificial formations: beside the materials available from pet stores like sisal or coconut fibers, the birds also used plastic and woolen threads as building materials, often in wild colors. It now seems unlikely that there is an actual aesthetic urge in the birds that is here at play, as once had been proposed by some historical ornithological texts.¹ Ultimately, the artist is the one who declares the nests to be miniature sculptures, by presenting them on pedestals.

Before Björn Braun engaged the two zebra finches as assistants to create these nests, he realized a series of works in which he himself imitated nature, building nests using the bristles of a broom, the twigs from a potted plant, or the bamboo rods from a birdcage. For another work, he placed cassette tape and wool near nesting boxes in a forest, and then showed the opened boxes with the nests that the forest birds built using the old cassette tape, mixed with grasses and ferns.

The nest represents one of the most primeval forms of housing: the word in middle German means a "place to sit." In Adalbert Stifter's novella *Granit* (Granite),² a boy builds nest-like beds using leaves, branches, and grasses for a girl sick with the plague on a trip through the

¹ "Finally, we should mention the pleasure nests, large arches decorated with colorful feathers, bones, and shells, not intended for brooding, but for the pleasurable meetings of the birds" (*Meyers Großes Konversationslexikon*, Vol. 14 [Leipzig 1908], 532–533).

² Adalbert Stifter, *Bunte Steine* [1853] (Goldman 1983), 39–40.

mountains. The two children are entirely isolated from civilization and at the mercy of nature, which only provides them with the bare minimum to survive. The girl ultimately recovers from the fatal illness due to the boy's close ties to nature. The figures in Stifter's narratives live in worlds that are shut off, following an inner order that is described by the author in minute descriptions of the landscape in which they move and the things they deal with. Everything and everyone has a place and a purpose, and only the irruption of natural forces or epidemics threatens the established order from time to time.

Reacting to Friedrich Hebbel's criticism that his figures and issues were insignificant, in his foreword to *Bunte Steine* (Colorful Stones) Adalbert Stifter formulated the "gentle law": what sustains man and nature does not lie in the sensational, but in slow growth and constant becoming. Slowness and recognizing the big in the small are also significant characteristics of Björn Braun's works. Some almost seem like direct illustrations of Stifter's novellas. Idyllic mountain worlds, panorama views over landscapes that can be overlooked are recurring motifs in his collages, as well as diverse symbols of the sedentary—chairs, benches, huts, or houses. They are sites of retreat, of taking pause, of contemplation that enable a view from the outside on the bustle of the world. In so doing, Björn Braun leaves the representational level of photographic material taken from folkloristic literature and travelogues by cutting out individual elements and combining them elsewhere to generate new content. The homeland idyll of the landscapes is thus broken; the visual space is opened up for something new. The beholder experiences this opening even more so in the handmade papers created using linen-bound editions of Stifter's works (*Der Waldgänger, Das Haidedorf, Bergkristall*). In a protracted process, the volumes are first milled, then boiled and made into papier maché, resulting in what is ultimately an almost monochromatic paper with recognizable remains of the linen fibers and sometimes the letters as well. In these landscapes, the beholder can move freely and develop associations to the work titles (that are always identical to the title of the Stifter novel that was used to create the paper) without having to follow a prescribed narrative. The association with a landscape becomes even clearer in a new work: a plank was removed from both the seat and back of a simple park bench and also made into papier maché. The horizontal line that results from superimposing the two parts of the image makes the abstract diptych into a landscape panorama, and the bench placed before it invites to contemplatively behold the melancholy seeming empty landscape.

Many of Björn Braun's works exhibit this ambivalence between ostensible humor and existential tragedy: a sticky fly trap full of bird feathers, or the standard egg carton that was made from a bird's nest, in which the eggs from the abandoned nest lie, somewhat lost. Here, the nest is no longer a site of security; the certainties and rules of Stifter's world no longer have validity in the fragmentary present.

Björn Braun: Making and Weaving

Veit Loers

(from the catalogue "Nest - Björn Braun")

To see pictures properly: this is not an instruction in art pedagogy, but rather an aid that helps to clarify content, to develop an understanding for a certain age, or to communicate principles of a work's structure. All this has little to do with art itself, but is a way to awaken an interest in art. More interesting is the comparison to the "hidden pictures" that were once found in young people's magazines and today can be found on the Internet. Here, the images differ by way of a series of hidden details that need to be found. To that end, the images have to be precisely examined; we need to enter into them and become at home in them to make any progress. These acts of mental acrobatics have nothing to do with art, but with images and precise vision. A pleasant occupation, for nobody asks about artistic content or interpretation. There is only a change, a pattern, or an added or deleted detail that needs to be found.

If we say that Björn Braun has made the idea of the hidden picture his philosophy, it wouldn't exactly be wrong, but we then forget the images. The images he uses as ready-mades are simple and unassuming: architectural views, landscapes, and genre scenes from a world of yesterday or before. They contain natural materials like stone and wood in trees and bushes, timber frame or stone facades that the artist cuts out to then surprisingly place in another location. Branches are used to create ladders, stones are used to create huts, timber frame and window formations become clothing patterns, and beard hair becomes a bird's nest. But surprising interventions also take place. The components of the stone from a distant mountain are lined up to become a fictive direct mule trail. The offset prints, oil prints, and photographs are not so much material storage for the whimsical larks of the artist. They are first of all nostalgic homeland that exude safety and familiarity. The paths are not yet paved in asphalt, the roofs usually still have tiles. The metamorphosis of the artistic concept takes nature and craftsmanship as its model.

This transformation also enters reality outside the images, in the material and exchange of the senses: an image is created using a crushed plank from the bench that is placed before the image. But the balance is maintained the artist's impish humor. What is taken from the realm of nature can appear in the space of art, and what is in space can retreat to the image. But we then leave the balance of the physical world and tie the world of notions and images to the real world, like Joseph Kosuth in a seminal early work of early concept art, *One and Three Chairs* (1965), where a chair is combined with its photographic depiction, and the dictionary entry for chair. If there was anyone who transformed the ideas of "nests" in the sense of

"housing" in an awareness of their materials, then it was artists like Mario Merz, Joseph Beuys, and Paul Thek: from a bunch of twigs to an igloo, from a case (as the housing of art and as a grave) to the seven thousand oaks and the newspaper warehouse to the sand castles. Naturally, Franz West would be the one to convert his mother's washing machine to a bench (1987) and Martin Kippenberger, following the German spoonerism "Into the forest I hike on in, because my pills will soon kick in" (Jetzt geh ich in den Birkenwald, denn meine Pillen wirken bald), covered cardboard tubes with birch laminate and had Spalt tablets (pain relievers) cut from wood.

Björn Braun links his visual metamorphoses in an all encompassing network of iconographic and conceptual constructs where the paradoxical aspect of his interventions can take on humoristic traits without detracting from poetic fantasy. Vision and reality, second and third dimension, are not categorically opposed to one another. There is a story about the great Chinese painter of the eighth century Wu Tao-tzu according to which in his old age, among a circle of friends, he disappeared into one of his pictures. Another version of the story is much more precise. It has him showing an almost complete mural at the imperial palace to Emperor Hsuan-Tsung. In a majestic landscape, he painted a door to a mountain. The painter then opens the door and asks the emperor to follow. As the emperor hesitates, the painter himself steps through the door. The door closes, and Wu Tao-tzu was never seen again. The painting disappeared that very instant.

“Die Gedanken sind frei...”¹

Hilke Wagner

(from the catalogue “Nest - Björn Braun”)

For his exhibition at Kunstverein Braunschweig, Björn Braun conceived a site-specific work. Using the frame of a historic window² from the ground floor, he made a birdhouse that is installed inside said exhibition space. The window that is transformed into a feeding house was taken from the garden side of the building, and is left unreplaced, attracting hungry birds into the exhibition, as the show takes place during the winter months.

The garden of Villa Salve Hospes (built in 1805-1808), which has housed Kunstverein Braunschweig since the 1950s, was originally a landscaped park based on the English model, a cultural landscape par excellence, that stands for the intersection of culture and nature as is repeatedly explored in Björn Braun’s work. The birdhouse, familiar from suburban yards, is in turn in itself a symbol for the “domestication” of wild animals. While ostensibly about offering animals food, it is really about taking pleasure in and observing nature in the most confining urban surroundings. The birdhouse, perhaps the enlightened form of the birdcage, does leave the animal outside, but all the same it is a form of bridled, or, as it were, colonized nature: it is no accident that birds are offered food in miniature houses.

Due to the unreplaced window, the temperature in the entire exhibition space cools noticeably. The factual dissolution of the line separating inside and outside, culture and nature, becomes physically palpable and flagrantly taken to the utmost when birds from the outside fly through the interior of the Kunstverein to the source of feed. In Björn Braun’s work, the blurring of the limit between art and natural beauty, artificial and the natural—a subject widely discussed in German philosophy from Kant through Hegel to Adorno—is always present, as is especially clear in the zebra finch nests presented in the mirrored hall: a cooperation between man and animal, for Braun provided the animals with the material used. The transformation, that is, the re-forming of already existing material, is thus not only typical of Braun’s way of proceeding but also a recurrent thematic motif in his work. At issue here is a dual

¹ This German song, “Thoughts are Free,” emerged at the start of the nineteenth century, and was published as text in 1842 by Hoffmann von Fallersleben.

² Since the windows of Villa Salve Hospes are designated part of a historical monument, the birdhouse was created using a true-to-original reconstruction.

metamorphosis of material and content. Destruction and recreation generally go hand in hand, as for example in another untitled work also included in the exhibition, which simply combines a wooden bench and a paper work. The paper was made using two wood planks from the bench, crushed and boiled in an intricate process, and now hangs as a landscape image that can be contemplated from the bench. Here too, an inversion: a place for the wanderer to rest inside, the abstract landscape as a projection surface for a soul landscape. Motifs of a perhaps typically German sentimentality from the early nineteenth century that in a rudimentary sense still defines our culture today often seem central to Braun's critical interest: wanderlust, a longing for freedom, sublime natural beauty. Like the German Wandervogel movement, which in the course of increasing industrialization on the threshold between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries united bourgeois youth in a drive towards freedom and longing for nature, motivating them to go out into nature and as a result making hiking so popular in Germany, not least by way of its music. In contrast to the Enlightenment, the gaze of these romantics was primarily directed at the landscape as a mirror of one's own, naturally free interior. Perhaps Braun is ironically referring to this notion in a different birdhouse work, completed using a stuffed cuckoo: almost cynically, the animal returns the gaze of the beholder, forcing him to confront himself.