

Matti Braun

Salo

04.09. – 14.11.2010

The Kunstverein Braunschweig is bringing the internationally acclaimed artist Matti Braun (born 1968) back to Braunschweig, the site of his artistic roots. For in the early nineties, he studied at the Braunschweig College of Fine Arts.

Braun's works range from smaller objects that in part suggest folkloristic pieces, such as ceramics, batiks, or woodcarvings to photography, works on video, and space-consuming installations. A major share of his artistic work consists of extensive research and travels: the stories his works tell deal with a variety of cultures and the surprising things that can emerge when a Bengali director goes to Hollywood, an African poet and theorist with a black self-awareness commissions Arno Breker to do his portrait, a German musician becomes a "Kapellmeister" (the leader of a choir or orchestra) in Indonesia, or Le Corbusier constructs a building in India. Matti Braun is not an explorer who brings back trophies from his expeditions. He is more of a seeker who discovers the ideas of aesthetic modernity in their emanations in the far reaches of the globe. Both Indonesian batiks or writings by the universal Indian scholar Rabindranath Tagore stem from this quest, as do carved objects based on northern European models. The catalogue being published in October in conjunction with his exhibition will also reflect his approach: heterogeneous texts provide subjective insight into different thematic complexes that look into historically contradictory, exciting phenomena that have previously received little attention. What is widely unknown is that Arno Breker designed a monument for the African Liberation, that a species of lotus otherwise found only in Southeast Asia and Egypt inexplicably flowers in a mini-biotope in Romania which, or that Spielberg's *E.T.* is based on a screenplay by an Indian author and director.

Matti Braun shifts and opens perspectives, recombines facts, and in doing so fills them with ambiguous meaning. His works consciously remain in limbo; they supply no answers. They do not adhere to a logical line of

thought but as a spinning referential and transitional network of complex contexts have a poetic, atmospheric effect.

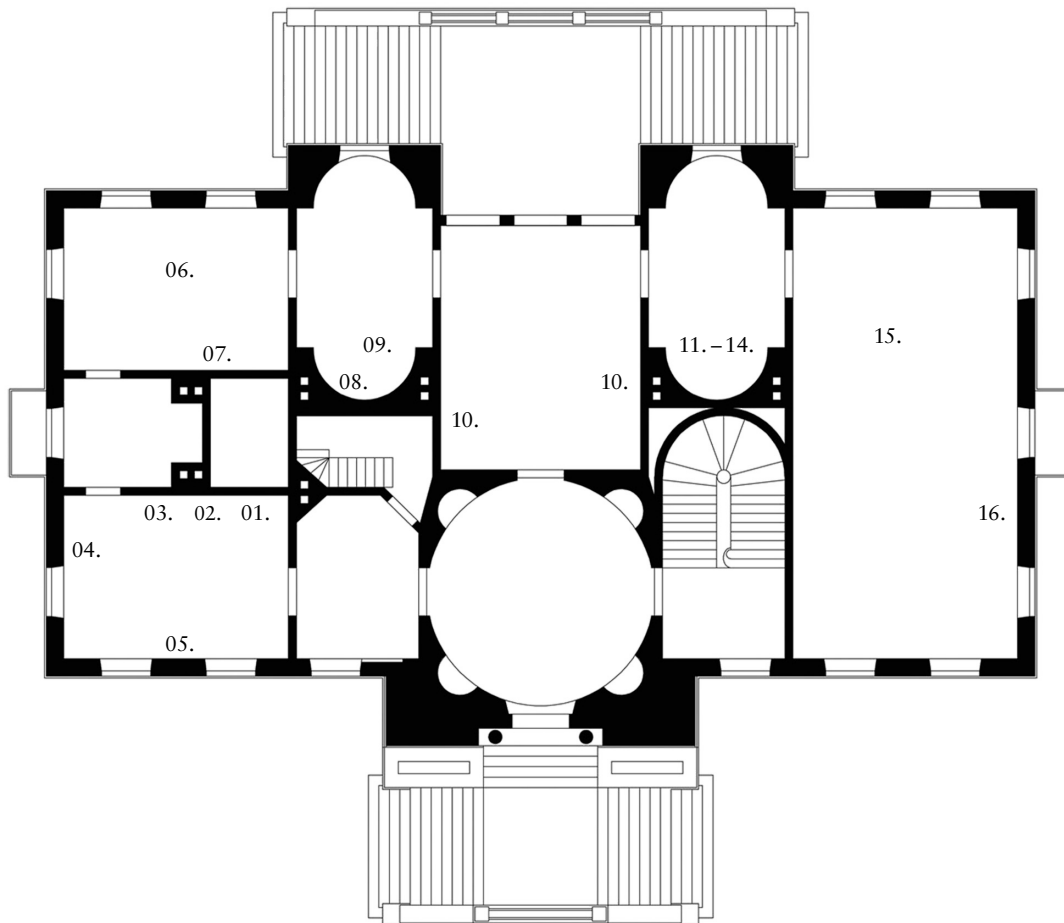
The title of the exhibition is also characteristic of Braun's artistic strategy of exploring intercultural contexts and reintegrating historical and personal truths. *Salo* implies several layers of meaning: in France, where at the end of the year parts of this exhibition will be presented, it has an insulting connotation; in Finland it means "solitude"; and it is also the name of a northern Italian town Pasolini's last film, *Salò*, or the *120 Days of Sodom* (1975) alludes to and which enjoyed ambivalent fame. as the capital of the Mussolini's Italian Social Republic.

Matti Braun, born in 1968 in Berlin, lives and works in Cologne. He studied at the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main and at the Braunschweig College of Fine Arts, among others with Emil Cimiotti. He has presented solo exhibitions at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne as well as at the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein.

The Buchhandlung Walther König is publishing a catalogue (German/French) in conjunction with the exhibition with contributions by Paola Jacoub, Marianne Lanavère, Abdellah Karroum, Jakob Vogel, Rudolph Smend, Mika Hannula, and Hilke Wagner.

Beginning in December 2011, the Kunstverein Braunschweig is presenting Matti Braun within the scope of the German-French exchange project *Thermostat* at *La Galerie-Centre d'Art Contemporain Noisy-le-Sec* near Paris.

Ground Floor



01. *Atol 2* (2008)
Butterflies, silk, wood, glass
70,2 x 54,2 x 10 cm

02. *Atol 3* (2008)
Butterflies, silk, wood, glass
70,2 x 54,2 x 10 cm

03. *Atol 11* (2008)
Batik on silk, wood
51,7 x 42,9 x 3,5 cm

04. *Untitled* (2009)
Butterflies, silk, wood, glass
70,5 x 54,5 x 10 cm

05. *Atol 9* (2008)
Batik on silk, wood

A warm, golden glow radiates from the space in which the group of works *Atol* has been installed. The butterfly cases and batiks that have been fixed to the walls are reflected in the brass floor as if in a body of water suffused with sunlight. The prepared butterflies have been accurately grouped in white display cases and are reminiscent of presentations in a museum of natural history. Although they are similar in form, they stem from a wide variety of regions and continents. They are shown alongside minimalist batiks. Matti Braun has become skilled in traditional Indonesian batik

techniques and in the process gained access to cultural patterns and forms. The silk batiks, in white frames, with vertical lines or dark streaks evoke a slight flickering in one's eye. Yet the modified streak motif, apparently modern and yet possessing an archaic, sacred character, makes reference to a pattern that can be found in traditional Indonesian batiks from the early twentieth century.

06. *Untitled* (2008)

Copper, glass, coins
80 x 40 x 111 cm

COURTESY S.A.L.E.S., ROME

07. *Özurfa* (2008)

Offset print, 13 parts
Dimensions variable

The parquet is covered with a dance floor; green neon tubes immerse the space in cool, pale light. The works being presented stem from the *Özurfa* series (*Özurfa* means “authentically Urfa”). Urfa is a city in south-eastern Anatolia near the border to Syria in the fertile region of the Euphrates and the Tigris and for centuries an important intersection point for trade, cultures, and religions. It is regarded as Abraham's possible place of birth and the first medieval Crusader state. In this work, Matti Braun casts a narrative net that pursues the far-reaching cultural and imaginary complexities and mythic tales. A legendary figure associated with Urfa is the actor and director Yılmaz Güney (1937-1984), who advanced to become a Turkish movie star and antihero in numerous action films. He was arrested several times because of his political stance and ultimately sentenced to many years of imprisonment because of suspected murder. In 1982, his film *Yol (The Way)* was awarded the Golden Palm in Cannes. The photograph on the wall shows Güney during the shooting of *Yol*.

The oldest copper finds from the area around Urfa go back to the ninth century B.C. Compared to other metals, copper stands out due to its development of a protective patina as it gradually oxidizes. In the

course of this lengthy process, the colors and structures change from a shiny red to a dull blue-green. In the antique and modern afterworld, Heliogabalus became the symbol of vice and decadence in the Roman Iron Age as well as for supposedly disastrous, Oriental cultural influences. The reign of the teenage emperor was overshadowed by a serious conflict between conservative Roman culture and the Syrian religious tradition it embodied. The coins stem from his period on the throne and feature him and members of his family. A photograph on the wall shows a dove. It is suspected that the dove originally comes from the Mesopotamia region. It proliferated from there throughout the Orient, where the tradition of its being bred and domesticated began in the seventh century. Because it was capable of finding its way to its dovecote over long distances, it was soon used by the military to deliver messages. Knowledge of its domestication initially made its way to Europe via the Crusaders, who had learned about this tradition from their Arabian combatants and their Turkish allies. Edessa, today's Urfa, is considered to be the first Crusader state governed by the Duke of Lorraine.

08. *Untitled* (2009)

2-part color photograph
44 x 34 x 2,8 cm each

09. *Untitled* (2003)

The dune-like pile of sand stems from the beach of Skhirat, Morocco, where the summer palace of the Moroccan king is located. During the birthday celebration of King Hassan II on August 16, 1971 – which was attended, among others by Arno Breker – a failed coup attempt took place in the palace.

10. *Untitled* (2010)

Fabric dye, raw silk, cold-rolled steel
Dimensions variable

The background for the presentation of new works is comprised of fluorescent walls that are illuminated by means of ultraviolet light. The incidence of daylight produces a constantly changing light atmosphere. The parquet flooring has been overlaid with a layer of screed. There are watercolors on the walls on raw silk and cotton and in steel frames. Matti Braun produced the one-of-a-kind works by hand using an experimental textile processing technique. Matti Braun calls the spatial installation *Pierre, Pierre*.

Batik (Javanese: “mbatik” = to write with wax) is a fabric dyeing technique that originated in Indonesia. Patterns and decorative details are applied to the fabric (cotton, linen, silk, etc.) by hand using melted wax from a tool called a *tjanting*, a small copper pot. When the fabric is dyed, these areas that have been covered with wax are unaffected by the dye. Indonesian batik is characterized by a variety of traditionally prescribed and often religiously or culturally connoted patterns as well as colors. Clothing made from batik fabrics or certain patterns were traditionally reserved for the strictly regimented Javanese upper class, in particular nobility. It was not until 1940 that the Sultan of Yogyakarta allowed all social classes to use batik. Even today, specific patterns are reserved for particular occasions (e.g., weddings).

11. *Ikat* (Early 20th century)

244 x 75 cm

Ikat is the Indonesian word for tying the warp fibers before weaving and refers to a specific weaving technique in which the threads are dyed before they are woven. This cloth shows the same pattern on both sides, mirrored from the center. This technique serves to save time, and when weaving with a back yoke, or when the fly shuttle is shot through with the weft thread, shifts occur in the pattern. This shawl was made on Sumba, one of the so-called Lesser Sunda Islands east of Bali, in the early twentieth century. When a king dies on Sumba, ikat cloths are placed in his grave even today. The Dutch, the former colonial rulers in Indonesia, were enthusiastic about the ikat cloths and brought them to Europe. This one stems from the collection of Walter Spies, who gave it to his sister Daisy Spies, a dancer who lived in Berlin, in 1933.

12. *Kain Dodot*

Semé pattern, 373 x 212 cm

Kain Dodot also stems from Walter Spies collection. In the late twenties, Spies worked as “Kapellmeister” at the court of the Sultan of Yogyakarta on Java. It is conceivable that he received this dodot from a prince at the Sultan’s court or from the Sultan himself in recognition of what he did for music or as a farewell gift. He then later sent it to his family in Europe together with other souvenirs. A dodot is worn during very festive occasions at the sultan’s court, such as, for example, the coronation of a king.

13. *Kain panjang*

Hip wrap, 238 x 106 cm

COURTESY RUDOLF SMEND

Kain panjang is a hip wrap from Central Java. Compared with other batiks, the importance of this kain is not attributable to its fineness or its good state of preservation, but its provenience. Walter Spies wore the batik during his work as “Kapellmeister” at the Sultan’s palace. All of the staff and servants at the Sultan’s court wore a *sarong* that could be bound in a different way. The batik features filling ornaments, semé patterns; the wax was applied using the traditional *canting* technique.

14. *Tok wi* (ca. 1910/1920)

(Chinese altar cloth) Natural dyes on cotton
105 x 95 cm

COURTESY RUDOLF SMEND

Tok Wi originally served as an altar cloth for a Chinese home altar, to which it was attached with straps. It exhibits clear traces of use. The motif is puzzling. It allegedly shows Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf, actually a German fairytale, which may have reached Indonesia by way of the Dutch colonial rulers. Research also supports the existence of a Chinese adaptation of the Grimmian theme. In combination with the typically Javanese shadow play figures and the bicycles it constitutes a one-of-a-kind object in contemporary history. In addition, it testifies to the desire of the Chinese client and owner to assimilate into Javanese society as quickly as possible. As a minority that met with hostility, the Chinese were on the one hand anxious to integrate themselves while maintaining traditional Chinese customs on the other. They were for the most part successful merchants who settled-at the same time as did the Dutch-on the northern coast of Java.

15. *The Alien* (2005)

Stage design, hand-colored fabric

279 x 368,5 x 330 cm installation dimensions

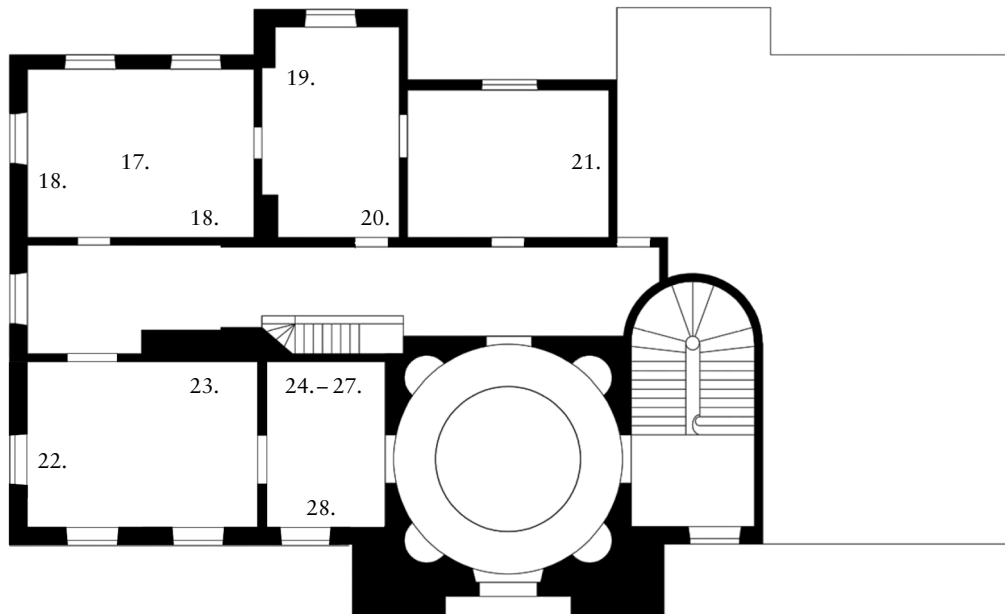
16. *Untitled* (2007)

4 C-Prints

27,3 x 29,9 cm each

The installation in the hall of mirrors is a stage model for the play *The Alien* produced by Matti Braun, which is based on a screenplay from 1967 by Satyajit Ray (1921-1992), an Indian director and recipient of the Oscar, that was never adapted for the screen. The plot revolves around the crash landing of an extraterrestrial spacecraft in a lotus pond near a Bengali village. However, the story also indirectly deals with the conflict between rural and modern life in India and from the tensions that inevitably arise when a transformation of traditional ways of life is imposed from the outside. The photographs were taken during a performance of the play in London in 2006 – a synthesis of visual art, contemporary dance, performance, spoken text, and music.

Upper Floor



17. *Untitled* (2000)

7 stools, fiberglass and polyester, light beige

18. *Exhibition posters* (1995–2002)

Dimensions variable

As abstract sculptures, the objects have their own aesthetic value, yet they can also be used as utility objects. The walls feature posters for exhibitions of the artist's work from 1995 onwards.

19. *Untitled* (1994)

Porcelain, overglaze technique

Matti Braun used an overglaze technique to paint blank vases. The ornamental decoration was not added until after the gloss firing.

20. *Rajkot* (2002)

C-Print, 33,7 x 25,1 cm

The photograph shows the Indian *Calico Museum of Textiles*, which is situated on a spacious, park-like plot of land and houses an impressive and multifaceted collection of Indian textiles, miniature painting, and sculptures. The Sarabhai family, who for decades resided in what is now the museum building, stems from a dynasty of textile manufacturers in Ahmedabad in western India

21. *Untitled* (2004)

Within living memory, the lotus has thrived in Romania, near the border to Hungary, on a lake fed by warm springs. No one is capable of saying how this beauty, which flowers at night, made its way to this East European lake. Curious hypotheses about the origin of this lotus biotope have been circulating since the eighteenth century: was it occupying Turkish forces

who introduced this invasive species in the sixteenth century, or were their seeds carried there by migratory birds? Other theories assume that this endemic species is a remnant of subtropical vegetation from the Tertiary period that survived the Ice Age. In the vernacular the lake is called the “Eye of the Gypsy,” thus making reference to a nearby settlement.

22. *Untitled* (2003)

5 parts, black-and-white offset prints on paper
70 x 57 cm, 70 x 58 cm, 70 x 59 cm,
70 x 55 cm, 70 x 59 cm

The prints feature manuscript and journal pages by the Bengali poet, philosopher, painter, and composer Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), who received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 and was thus the first Asian Nobel recipient. The university scholar Tagore (also called Thakur) was considered to be an influential cultural and social reformer and played an important role in the combination of traditional with modern influences through his deliberate attack of their rigid structure and formal language. As a lyricist and playwright he is regarded as a pioneer of Bengali stagecraft. His educational ideal found expression in a university he established in the Bengali province that adhered to a reformed educational approach and where Sayajit Ray, the author of *The Alien*, was a student. Tagore's goal was the encounter and fusion of different cultures. He appealed for a synthesis of the positive elements of Eastern and Western thought on his countless lecture tours.

23. *Untitled* (Ceramic Plates) (1996)

Dimensions variable

24. *Farmer in Autumn Landscape* (2002)

Offset print, 56 x 47 cm

25. *Woman with Parasol* (2002)

Offset print, 46,5 x 47 cm

26. *Pine Forest* (2002)

Offset print, 68 x 75 cm

27. *Forked Path* (2002)

Offset print, 58 x 49 cm

The prints show paintings by the Japanese painter Tetsugoro Yorozu (1885-1927). The artist is considered a forerunner of modern Japanese painting, which began borrowing from European art in around 1900. The *nanga* (Chinese-style ink paintings) presented here, which he produced in the twenties, are a blend of Western and Eastern tradition, which Tetsugoro Yorozu again addressed in his late work.

28. *Untitled* (1994)

Wood, tempera
25 x 32 x 9,2 cm

Untitled (1994)

Wood, tempera
40,5 x 40,3 x 9,5 cm

Untitled (1994)

Wood, tempera
28,5 x 23,8 x 8 cm

Untitled (1994)

Holz, Tempera
32,6 x 24,5 x 13,7 cm

Untitled (1994)

Wood, tempera
26,8 x 23,6 x 9,2 cm

COURTESY GALERIE DANIEL BUCHHOLZ, COLOGNE

Matti Braun produced the wooden objects according to a northern European model. This type of sculpture was traditionally given away as a courtship gift.

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The exhibition Matti Braun. *Salò* is being supported by:



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The Kunstverein Braunschweig is sponsored by:



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Opening hours:
Tuesdays - Sundays 11 am-5 pm, Thursdays 11 am-8 pm
Guided public tours:
Thursdays 6 pm, Sundays 2.30 pm