

HYPERALLERGIC

“Turn the Page: The First Ten Years of Hi-Fructose”

This exclusive exhibition at Virginia MOCA features world-renowned artists such as Ron English, Shepard Fairey, Camille Rose Garcia, James Jean, Yoshitomo Nara, Mark Ryden, Todd Schorr, Wayne White, Kehinde Wiley, and others that have never been shown together in one place at one time.

Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) | November 17, 2016



One-of-a-kind meets once-in-a-lifetime as the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) begins to wrap up *Turn the Page: The First Ten Years of Hi-Fructose*, an unprecedented exhibition showcasing 51 of some of the foremost contemporary artists of our time in Virginia Beach on view now through Dec. 31, 2016.

This MOCA curated retrospective celebrates the ten-year anniversary of the new contemporary art magazine Hi-Fructose. This exclusive exhibition features world-renowned artists such as Ray Caesar, Beth Cavener, Wim Delvoye, Audrey Kawasaki, Kris Kuksi, Travis Louie, Tara McPherson, Marion Peck, Jeff Soto, Gary Taxali, Erwin Wurm, and many others that have never been shown together in one place at one time. Accolades about *Turn the Page* have been numerous, along with the miles' visitors are traveling to view this unique and rare exhibition.

“I traveled over 500 miles to view this exhibition and it was worth it!” – “I had one day in Virginia Beach and had to visit Virginia MOCA”. – “Visually breathtaking... make a trip to MOCA. It will AMAZE you!”

Ten years ago, two San-Francisco-based artists, Annie Owens-Seifert and Daniel “Attaboy” Seifert started an art magazine to share the type of art they loved. Over the years, Hi-Fructose magazine has become an influential publication with a devoted international readership, celebrating diverse art that transcends genres from artists who break away from conventional trends.

If you haven't viewed this spectacular exhibition, make plans now!

Turn the Page closes Dec. 31, 2016.

Visit virginiamoca.org for more information.

Art-Sheep Features: The Unsettling Wooden Sculptures of Gehard Demetz

by Agape Charmani



Gehard Demetz is an Italy born and based artist. Known for his provocative wooden sculptures, Demetz introduces traditional woodcarver to a contemporary audience, through his sculpted artworks, portraying children in inappropriate situations.

His delicate, fine works deal with issues so sensitive, that it makes them unsettling for the viewer. The use of objects in the hands or the bodies of the children add to the macabre notion of the work. As it is written on Demetz' website, *"One of the most startling technical features is the construction using small woodblocks and juxtaposing finely polished parts to very rough and sketchy surfaces. This particular construction and treatment render his sculptures absolutely unique in the domain of contemporary wood sculpture and is partly responsible for the great curiosity aroused by the appearance of his work in the art world."*







kunst raum rottweil

museum der gegenwart

im dominikanermuseum rottweil

EINLADUNG ZUR ERÖFFNUNG



IM DIALOG

Gotik trifft Gegenwart



12. Oktober 2014 bis 1. März 2015

Zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung

IM DIALOG

Gotik trifft Gegenwart

am 12. Oktober 2014 um 11.00 Uhr
laden wir Sie herzlich ein.

Begrüßung

Bürgermeister Werner Guhl

Grußwort

Dr. Fritz Fischer,

Landesmuseum Württemberg, Stuttgart

Einführung

Jürgen Knubben

Musikalische Umrahmung


dominikanermuseumrottweil

drei epochen. ein ort.

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dominikanermuseum@rottweil.de | www.dominikanermuseum.de

Öffnungszeiten: Di. – So. 10.00 bis 17.00 Uhr



Hl. Erasmus
Oberschwaben, um 1490
Bischof von Antiochien, Märtyrer;
mit einer Winde,
mit der ihm die Eingeweide aus
dem Leib gewickelt wurden;
einer der 14 Nothelfer,
Patron der Drechsler und Seeleute,
Helfer gegen Unterleibskrankheiten
Aus Mengen-Ennetach, Lkr. Sigmaringen
Lindenholz, spätere Fassung



Katsura Funakoshi
Dancing as a pupa (Homage to a dancer) | 2001 | bemaltes Campher-Holz, Marmor, Stahl,
97 x 84 x 80 cm | Privatsammlung - Courtesy Galerie Beck & Eggeling, Düsseldorf

MICHEL ERHART
DANIEL MAUCH
HANS MULTSCHER
NIKLAUS WECKMANN
MEISTER VON WEILEN
UND
ANONYMI

HORST ANTES
STEPHAN BALKENHOL
FRANZ BERNHARD
JÜRGEN BRODWOLF
MARKUS DAUM
GERHARD DEMETZ
KATSURA FUNAKOSHI
BEATE GÜNTHER
ANTON HILLER
MARTIN HONERT
THOMAS LEHNERER
JUAN MUNOZ
THOMAS RUFF
KARIN SANDER
THOMAS SCHÜTTE
CINDY SHERMAN
WIEBKE SIEM
THOMAS STRUTH
WOLFGANG TILMANN
CORINNE WASMUTH

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Stadt  Rottweil

 Kreissparkasse
Rottweil

 Landkreis
Rottweil

 FORUM
KUNST
ROTTWEIL

12. Oktober 2014 bis 1. März 2015

IM DIALOG - Gotik trifft Gegenwart

Die Abteilung „Sakrale Kunst des Mittelalters - Sammlung Dursch“ im Dominikanermuseum in Rottweil beinhaltet herausragende Werke schwäbischer Bildhauer der Spätgotik aus dem 14. bis frühen 17. Jahrhundert. Zum ersten Mal werden im Kunst Raum Rottweil einzelne Skulpturen dieser Sammlung Arbeiten der Gegenwartskunst auf Augenhöhe gegenübergestellt. Im Dialog der Kunstwerke erfahren die Besucher Unterschiede und Gemeinsamkeiten.

Zur Ausstellung erscheint ein Katalogbuch.

Kurator: Jürgen Knubben



Hl. Barbara
Hans Multscher, Ulm, um 1450
Aus dem Zisterzienserinnen-Kloster
Heiligkreuztal in Altheim, Lkr. Biberach
Weidenholz, Originalfassung
nach Restaurierung



Thomas Ruff
Porträt (Petra Lappat) | 1987
C-Print, Diasec | 210 x 165 cm
Sammlung Landesbank
Baden-Württemberg

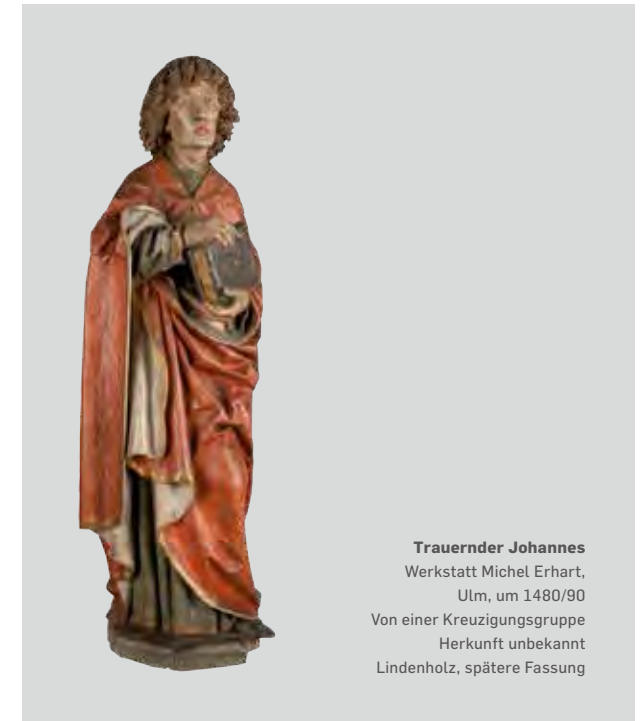
„Man merkt es vielleicht wirklich erst, wenn man sie direkt nebeneinander stellt. Eine Madonnenskulptur aus dem 15. Jahrhundert und irgendeine plastische Arbeit von heute, ein Altarblatt von damals und eine Fotografie oder ein Gemälde von heute. Beide Dialogobjekte sind von Menschen gefertigt. Nur die Zeit trennt sie von ihren Auffassungen.“

Daseins- und Selbstverständnis des Künstlers im 15. Jahrhundert weichen von den Bedingungen im 21. Jahrhundert signifikant ab. Ja, sie scheinen nur als Gegensätze diskutierbar zu sein. Müsste sich ein mittelalterlicher Künstler der Gotik heute mit einem zeitgenössischen Kollegen treffen, dann würde zumindest einer von beiden auf der Stelle tot umfallen. Leicht zu erraten, wer das sein würde. Sie hätten kein gemeinsames Maß, an dem sie ihre Existenzformen messen könnten. Die einzige Schnittmenge, die ihren fiktiven Dialog eröffnen könnte, wäre die jeweils produzierte Kunst. Aber auch da würden sie mit einander fremden Nomenklaturen reden müssen.

Kein Wunder, denn herrschaftspolitische, soziologische, demografische, geografische, technische und kulturelle Voraussetzungen haben sich über die Jahrhunderte gewaltig verändert. War der Künstler des 15. Jahrhunderts im allgemeinen und in erster Linie ein Handwerker, der eben auch malt, bildhauert, goldschmiedet etc., so agiert er heute weitestgehend als Ideengeber und Produzent für einem Kunstmarkt, der als Kunsthandel einem weltweit installierten Kunstbetriebssystem einbeschrieben ist, dessen Mechanismen schwer einseh- und begreifbar sind und nicht selten dubios bis irrational erscheinen. Aber auch der mittelalterliche Künstler war mit Förderung und Missachtung genauso konfrontiert wie mit Intrige und Konkurrenz, der freie mehr als der zunftgebundene. Nur eben in überschaubarem Maße.

Der Künstler und die Künstlerin von heute sehen sich mit einem sehr viel breiteren Fächer an Aufgaben, Anforderungen und Kompetenzen konfrontiert. Sie sind – oder müssen sich zwangsläufig so verstehen – jeweils für sich ein Einzelunternehmen, ein firmenähnliches Konstrukt, bei dem die betriebswirtschaftlichen Schritte, von der Konzeption, der Herstellung bis zum Vertrieb, in – von Ausnahmen abgesehen – der Zuständigkeit und Verantwortung einer Person liegen.“

(aus dem Katalogbeitrag von Herbert Köhler, Ravensburg)



Trauernder Johannes
Werkstatt Michel Erhart,
Ulm, um 1480/90
Von einer Kreuzigungsgruppe
Herkunft unbekannt
Lindenholz, spätere Fassung



Corinne Wasmuth | Haare I (Ausschnitt) | 1993 | Ausschnitt | Öl auf Holz
280 x 167 cm | Sammlung Landesbank Baden-Württemberg

GEHARD DEMETZ

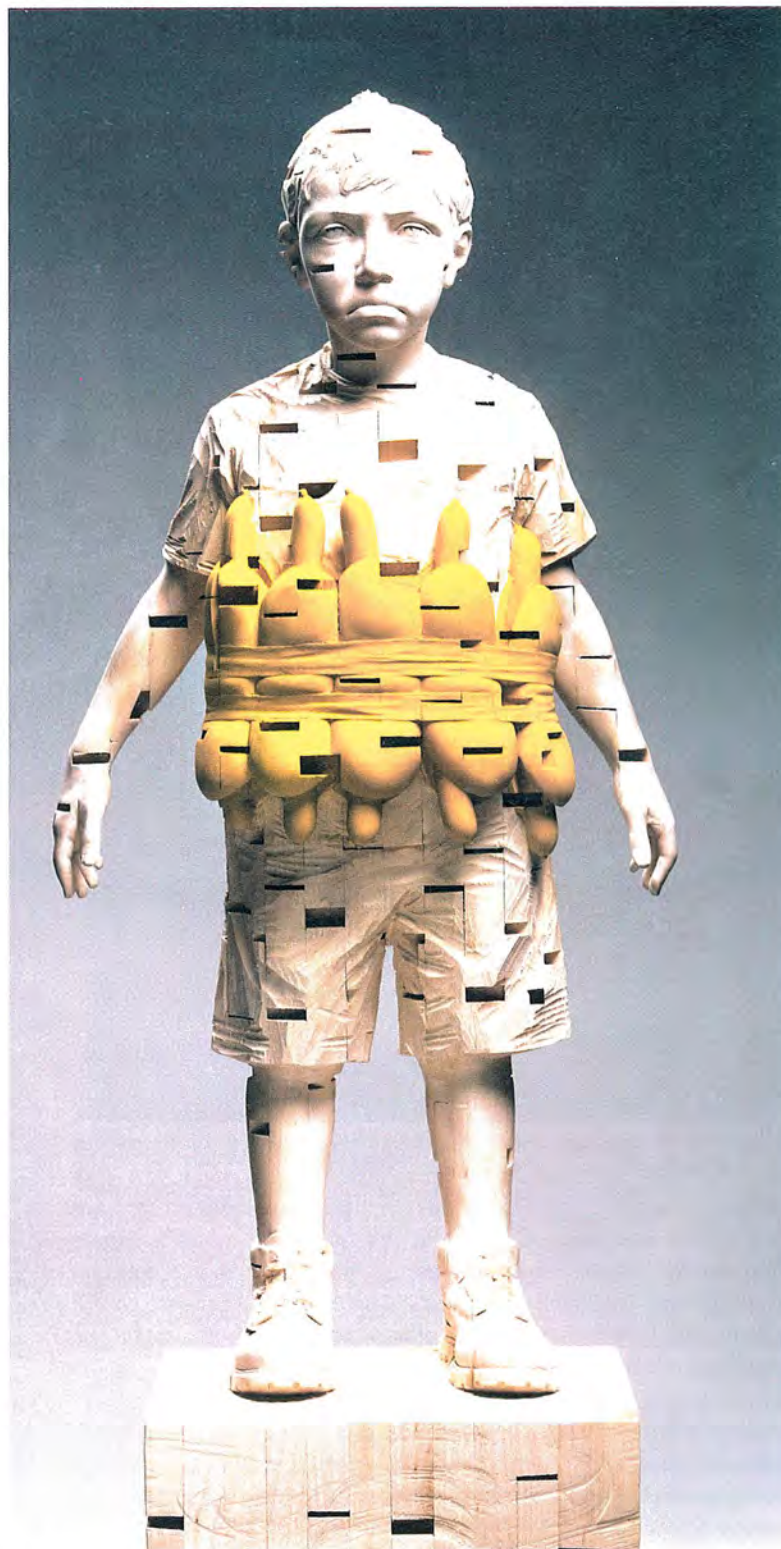
JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY · New York City, NY

An artist whose roots are clearly connected with the traditional craft of figurative sculpture, Gehard Demetz nevertheless manages to bring enough contemporary theoretical concerns with his newest body of work, sculptural representations of children made from wood, that it can be addressed on many levels. Hailing from Italy, a country facing the impossible task of escaping from the shadow of its past artistic glories, namely the Renaissance, Demetz was influenced by large religious statues in his childhood. There is a solemn quality to much of the work on view, especially in the facial expressions of the children, as shown in *A Whisper Under Water*, 2012, where a confident tween girl with pigtails holds two oil cans at her side, straddling a rectangular base. The sculpture can be easily compared to larger-than-life religious icons of the past; where they diverge, however, is in its references to current events, such as the never-ending thirst for crude oil by industrialized nations that has caused so much conflict and misery in the Persian Gulf. The title suggests that no one is listening to the will of the children, or possibly alludes to the environmental chaos that often goes hand in hand with oil exploration, such as the explosion of British Petroleum's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig in April 2010 in the Gulf of Mexico, which leaked millions of barrels of black sludge into the water.

Demetz also differentiates his forms from classical sculpture with his method of carving the figures from modular pieces of wood to form a new whole. By leaving empty rectangular slats throughout the figures and base, with the backs consisting of hollowed-out sections, Demetz gives them a more contemporary feel not unlike toy Legos or some contemporary architecture. This technique may also be a commentary on children themselves, whose bodies and brains are still developing and not fully formed. In *My Shadow Can Walk on Water*, 2011, a young boy stands with a somber face; strapped to his chest are five matte yellow hot dogs. This staple foodstuff of picnics, a popular cuisine among children, in this instance takes on an ominous tone, as the accessory resembles an explosive device that a terrorist suicide bomber would use. Demetz seems to be insinuating that a child, so full of innocence on the one hand, could also be capable of great harm.

More demure are the smaller sculptures, also on carved bases but placed atop white pedestals, including *Tell Daddy Why You Are Crazy*, 2012, and *The Sun Has Forgotten Us*, 2012. In both, children with their hands at their sides are penetrated through their midsections by cathedral spires painted black, in stark contrast to the lime wood of the figures. The weight of history and religion seems to take its toll on the youth, who at this age should be carefree, but instead appear thoroughly reverent and meditative. With his extreme attention to detail and high level of skill, Demetz is linked with past master artists of his native Italy; yet by bringing in present-day anxieties and having some flexibility with his materials, he avoids the trappings of a strict formalist.

- Chris Bors



Gehard Demetz, *My Shadow Can Walk on Water*, 2011, lime wood and acrylic paint, 66 1/8 x 20 1/2 x 12 5/8"

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NY

Gehard Demetz

The Italian artist's wooden sculptures of children carry objects inspired by war and religion

Text **Rebecca Fulleylove** ([/user/RebeccaFull](#))



Gehard Demetz



There's something haunting about Italian [Gehard Demetz](http://www.geharddemetz.com/) (<http://www.geharddemetz.com/>)'s breathtaking sculptures, in which he pairs figures of children with various objects that often touch upon themes of religion or war, creating a stark contrast of power. Wearing serene expressions upon their faces it's clear Demetz is not portraying the figures as victims. The artist seeks to communicate the idea that for once children are in a commanding role, that they hold a secret, a knowledge.

Trained in sculpture, Demetz is a true craftsman uses an array of textures and skills in his work. Constructed from wooden blocks, the lines where the blocks fit together remain exposed in his sculptures but despite this there's a fluidity and smoothness to the finer details. Here Demetz tells us about his process of making the complex sculptures and the choices he makes when creating them.

Dazed Digital: Where did you learn your craft?

Gehard Demetz: My interest in sculpture goes back to my childhood, when I was enchanted by those huge religious statues. In Val Gardena there is a consolidated artistic tradition of sculpting that goes back more than three hundred years. I spent the first six years of my training as a sculptor in the Art School in Selva, the village I was born in and where I live today.

DD: What's your process when creating a sculpture? Where do your ideas come from?

Gehard Demetz: I retain the idea with small sketches and drawings. As a second step I build up a mould of the figure with wooden pieces – module. This technique enables me to construct and to remove with curving steels and the same time. Usually I begin with the head and adapt the rest of the body to the facial expression. The skin related parts become tensioned and subsequently smoothed with sandpaper.

I assemble the ideas of my work by reading and living. I try to create a dialogue, to make questions and to think over possible answers with every sculpture. I work with pictures of children, overleaping them with these adults. I want the child in their position to have an expression that looks grown-up.

DD: Your work uses children as the main subject, what's the intention behind this? Do you find it interesting to put them in a position of power?

Gehard Demetz: My sculptures transmit the awareness of becoming adults and thus losing, as Rudolf Steiner says, their ability to be able to "hear" their unconscious. They live with the burden of guilt transmitted from generation to generation, which does not belong to them. They are children who feel sad about not being able to really be children, but who have, on the other hand, the possibility of choosing to become adults, totally independently, thus freeing themselves little by little of all the influences transmitted by their ancestors. They are witness to all the effort involved in the process of growth and development, which is achieved through individual will and concentration.

DD: The children are paired with different objects, often weapons or religious iconography- why is this? Do you like this stark contrast?

Gehard Demetz: The sculpture and the object work together. They belong to each other also if sometimes the object or the sculpture can be interpreted differently. I like that everybody comprehends my work with his own feelings, depending on his past, his experiences and his background, constructing his own stories. My greatest ambition is to start a dialogue between my sculptures and those who look at them.

DD: What are the reasons for the visible gaps between the blocks in your sculptures?

Gehard Demetz: My sculptures are modelled piece by piece and the building up of the wooden elements recalls the growing up of a child with his fragility and uncompleted procedure.

DD: What are your plans for this year?

Gehard Demetz: At the moment I am preparing sculptures for an exhibition for the gallery Jack Shainman in New York and for different Art fairs as the Armory Show and Art Cologne.

GEHARD
DEMETZ
CONTENITORE



LITTLE BIG CREATURES

THEY NEVER LOOK AT YOU – THEY WATCH YOU

„I am interested in another level of analysis, where the superficial gloss of the image does not count but rather the understanding of the deep roots of my subjects, those roots that make them act and be in a certain way.“¹

The sculptures by the Italian artist Gehard Demetz generally depict children, who confront the viewer as small adults. They consciously irritate and provoke the beholder, all the while remaining distanced and unapproachable, as though they were retreating into a small ‚big world‘ of their own, within which they playfully explore all that matters to grown-ups. They examine everything very carefully, scrutinize adult motivations and tend to take a critical view of world affairs. They play with fire, probing the boundaries of their own power. They walk a fine line between being a child and becoming an adult, between unconscious action and conscious behaviour, between playful innocence and painful awakening.

The playfulness so innate to children is reflected in the creator’s practice. Instead of carving his figures out of a single block of wood, he uses a number of modular components to mould and construct them. Demetz employs the traditional craftsmanship of woodcarving and transforms it into a completely unique and contemporary language within the field of sculpture. Upon closer examination, his figures appear fragmentary and complete at the same time. The body is a shell, constructed out of wooden modules – a shell out of which emerge the distinguishing parts and accessories, all carved in an elaborate and realistic manner. Only the bare skin, the face, hands and legs are generally delicate. Hair and clothes are carved in an expressive manner. Geometrical signs arise from the cracks and empty spaces left between the modules. The abstract composition thus created (re-)structures the realistic character of the frontal view. Seen from behind, the figure is a mere silhouette built from geometrical elements. The unity of the sculpture originates from a multiplicity of wooden modules glued together. Tradition and innovation, the finished and the unfinished, realism and its denial are only some of the contradictions in the wake of which these sculptures develop their full intensity.

Demetz endows his figures with a critical mind of their own. These children seem to take responsibility for their parents’ and ancestors’ actions and the intrigues of other adults. And yet they keep a critical distance to it all. By placing them

life-size on a pedestal, the artist gives his figures and their behaviour a seriousness, which is not easy to disregard. Due to the integrated plinth, the youngsters always communicate at eye level with the adult viewer, though they rarely allow direct eye contact. They demand respect.

Four life-size figures engaged in questioning the frequently contradictory cultural values which characterise contemporary society form the core of the current exhibition. The moral values are represented here by religion, the material ones by economics. His legs apart and face transfixed, a small boy holds a crucifix in his hands as if he were protecting himself or threatening the viewer with a rifle. Whether a child warrior coerced into fighting for specific beliefs or a child abused by a person of trust or member of the Church, innocence and childhood are irrevocably lost. The artist is, in this case, less interested in how specific values are pursued and lived than he is in the way people let themselves be corrupted by them or the way in which they are exploited until eventually a loss of these same values appears unavoidable.

A cross and a tabernacle symbolise religion and the values intrinsic to it, while a jerrycan represents the profane. Being a container used for transporting and storing liquids, the jerrycan functions as a symbol either for water and its life-sustaining qualities or for the lucrative aspects of fuel and the material values of industrial societies. The ruthlessness of industry and money making was the subject of an earlier work by Demetz: *Be Priest*, a small girl armed with an oil pump, was created in 2010 at a time when the whole world was watching one of the most devastating ecological disasters unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico after an explosion had occurred on the oil rig *Deepwater Horizon*. The initials of the title of the sculpture are a discreet allusion to the oil company responsible for the disaster.

The artist's most recent works feature two significant new developments. For the first time two objects are taken out of their usual context and set apart as sculptures in their own right: A contorted tabernacle and a jerrycan embedded in Gothic ornaments with an almost sacred appearance. Taken in combination with the figures, these same props now forcibly penetrate the children's bodies like sharp weapons. What the viewer might, at first glance, perceive as an act of violence is in fact a logical development: It builds on the subversive sharpness intrinsic to all previous works by the artist. Seen in the context of the exhibition and its main theme, this initial perception of brutality can be interpreted as the subject's internalisation of the moral concepts being symbolised.

The title of the exhibition *contenitore* – containers – is not only a reference to the props given by Demetz to his most recent child figures. They are also a metaphor for the children themselves. According to the artist, children can be seen as a kind of container, because of their capacity to absorb or contain certain contents; contents which can be taken out again at a later time. In a similar way, children, in their zeal and fervour to discover the world, assimilate everything they experience with their five senses and, to everybody's surprise, spurt it out again without any prejudice and with irresistible charm, humour, stubbornness or defiance. In a way, this is exactly how the figures Demetz creates would behave.

One of the essential characteristics of Demetz' figures is their ability and will-power to successfully free themselves from the burdens of the past. Because he appears to have no hands, a small orthodox Jew is sentenced not to be able to act for himself. Could this little Hebrew's assumed incapacitation be a symbol for the history of his fellow believers – a history shaped by a threatened existence? It is striking how sad and yet determined the boy looks, as if he

were clearly opting for the future, while still honouring the past. Man might, through his actions, jeopardise the future of his children. But Demetz' child figures are definitely no victims. On the contrary, they are headstrong, self-conscious, curious, ingenious and determined. They defend themselves if need be. They are enigmatic creatures, who, beyond their critical attitude towards society and the burden of their past, are at peace with themselves and always nurse a glimmer of hope.

„They live with the burden of guilt transmitted from generation to generation, which does not belong to them. They are children who feel sad about not being able to really be children, but who have, on the other hand, the possibility of choosing to become adults, totally independently, thus freeing themselves little by little of all the influences transmitted by their ancestors.”²

KIRSTEN NORDAHL

¹ Gerhard Demetz, *Conversation with Luigi Fassi* in: Paolo Galli (ed.), *Gerhard Demetz. Sculptural Child Figures*, Silvana Editoriale, Milan, 2008, p. 50.

² *Ibid.*, p. 44.



GEHARD
DEMETZ



The Other Side of the World: Gehard Demetz' Sculptural Child Figures

Rolf Lauter

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It is not surprising that Gehard Demetz' enigmatic child figures appear in a time marked by complex anthropological changes and developments. His central theme is man, or better, the image of man in our time, and here particularly the portrayal of children and adolescents in puberty, which is mysterious for many reasons. Demetz cuts the child figures from wood or synthetic material. Their bodies are fragmented figurative shells that express a high degree of self-questioning, scepticism, incertitude, vulnerability, ambiguity and vicissitude. At the same time they come across as hard, hermetically sealed and self-protective portraits of humans, which radiate a distanced coolness. These sensitive or wounded creatures refer us to another side of life – to a world, which broaches on an endless continuity of adult neglect as well as the children's quest for a better understanding. Demetz child sculptures also reveal a world beyond that of established sculpture, by questioning contemporary family structures and pointing out the individual fate of children and youths as a central aspect of his artistic focus.

What is it that makes Demetz' child figures so unfathomably sad, lonely, aloof and unique?

Firstly: it is their material. Cut from white wood or acrylic they come across as being inapproachable, almost majestic. Symbolically, the child figures' whiteness refers to purity and innocence and at the same time it transmits an antiseptic coldness and distance that gives them a kind of aural shield against adult influence. In their statuary poses these seemingly frozen creatures assert themselves as intensely innate and self-contained people, akin to another world than those of adults or children. They are de-emotionalized beings, systematically untrained or deprived of feeling, withdrawn to their inner selves in order to protect themselves from physical or psychological injury, knowing that their outer appearance should not reveal anything about their inner conditions. Their expressions reveal that they have withdrawn to be their own masks, manifesting themselves as inspirited "machine men." They bear resemblance to the Golem, whose lifeless mass is brought to life through Kabbalistic rituals and numerological mysticism. While the Golem was created for the sake of human society, Demetz' child sculptures seem to turn away from the everyday world, leading estranged autistic existences as totem-like memorials to a world hostile to children and creativity.

Secondly: it is their fragmentation! Looking at the figures more closely, walking around them to explore the plasticity and structure of their bodies, one becomes aware of various rectangular gaps or openings in the material, shaft- or drawer-shaped holes, lacking material, filled only with emptiness. They are pictorial relicts from the Surrealist time warp in Salvador Dalí's paintings, which subversively draw our attention to the relativity and transience of human life. They are also points of injury, where children's bodies break open and no longer appear intact. Besides these deliberately set blank spaces, some of the figures' backs are hollowed out, making them more like reliefs than freestanding sculptures. In this respect we find ourselves opposite concrete "bodies of art" rather than mimetic representations of people. The figures become relicts of a structural constructivist depiction of man. They touch on Manneristic notions of *l'homme machine* as a harbinger of Arte Programata and the kinetic art of the 1960s. On the other hand, Demetz' figures are characterized by a demonstrative presence and undercutting ordinariness, which makes us shudder.

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Thirdly: Demetz uses the style and attributive configuration of his works to amplify their effect. He employs theatrically charged elements to question naturalness and uses transformation to destabilize the children's physical integrity and give them the quality of something unfinished, cocoon-like, bizarre and unreal. They are presented like little grown-ups – pubescent beings, who play with the utensils of adulthood, demonstrating their sensitive knowledge of life's hazards and illusions. Equipped with things, like keys, women's boots, men's ties, scissors etc., the figures express their readiness to enter the adult world and even instinctively challenge it. In order to test reactions and learn from venturesome enterprises they temporarily slip into adult shells. In this way the child figures mirror thought-provoking ideas and meaning. Most of us can probably remember a situation where we were confronted with the stern, inaccessible and emotionless behaviour, the introvert psychological expressions or cruel poises of children, and being seriously upset by their adolescent directness and honesty. Understanding this feeling of strangeness and incongruity, which the experiment of being an individual constitutes, this need to define and exert oneself, is prerequisite to being able to release children from the family context and allow them to go their own way.

Fourthly: Demetz has an interest in transporting specific ideas. The child figure sculptures are symbolically charged creatures from their very own different world, a world that usually shuts grown-ups out and only opens up when a child develops a particular sense of trust, and the adult – looking back on his or her own past – becomes aware how similar their situations are. Demetz' figures don't allow viewers to make eye contact or seek other kinds of dialogue with them, instead they are hermetic creatures of a strange kind, of an "other" kind, unfathomable and inaccessible. They are characters that could have escaped from *Lord of the Flies*, lonely militant creatures demonstrating the power of corporal presence and negatively geared activity, as they dominate others with





their emotional coldness. Demetz transfers this childish coldness, which is particularly manifest in a feeling of loneliness, to the world of art. Art is used here as a direct means of reference to social connections with specific ideas and meanings. The representations mirror sociopolitical cultural concepts, which confront us with a clear message.

In the context of art history and contemporary sculpture, Demetz' figures increase their potential for interpretation as partly traditional and partly innovative modules of inference in a not so ideal world. Somehow resembling the protagonists in existentialist plays, like those of Jean Paul Sartre, these hermetic child figures generally pose many questions about the certitude of existence. Is it still appropriate to grant different age groups varying degrees of recognition and respect? Could a better integration of childish ideas and attitudes not perhaps make things a little easier and improve social reality? Would it not be worth a try, to allow children to live out their creativity in everyday life, so that we can learn from them how non-linear thought processes work?



The earth is under me right now, 2005, wood / legno / Holz, 160 x 37,5 x 32 cm





Demetz draws our attention to his perception of life, existence and being human, and his child figures introduce us to a wide range of open questions that may find answers sometime in the future, although these don't quite seem to exist yet. However, by maximizing our empathy as adults we can aspire to create a more tolerant and just society, in which the individual can play his or her unique role regardless of age, and where this is respectfully acknowledged by others. Somehow one can be grateful to Demetz and his carefully staged and skillfully constructed sculptures, with which he questions the time after gender mainstreaming, a time, in which children have the right to develop their own personalities. This can only happen within the framework of new educational concepts and projects that foster the personal development of children and teenagers, encouraging creativity, rather than following business-oriented and functional aims. This could enable a more ambitious cultural education, through which the individual, as an artist and creative individual in the sense of Joseph Beuys' vision, is empowered to unleash and employ his or her intrinsic intellectual and creative potential.





Gehard Demetz

Conversation with Luigi Fassi

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LF: Let's talk about your artistic development, about your background and the beginning of your career. You live in Val Gardena, an unusual context for an artist, quite cut-off from the main Italian centres but open to many influences from German-speaking countries, such as Austria. What impact has this had on your work?

GD: My interest in sculpture goes back to my childhood, when I was enchanted by those huge religious statues. In Val Gardena there is a consolidated artistic tradition of sculpting that goes back more than thirty years. Everyone thinks this tradition of wood sculpture came from Poland.

I spent the first six years of my training as a sculptor in the Art School in Selva, the village I was born in and where I live today. In 1996 I started teaching sculpture in the Sculpture School in Selva and I taught there for ten years.

During that time I concentrated on my development as an artist, following academic courses in Salzburg and my own individual research. With the passing of the years and all those changes that inevitably entails, I realised that teaching took too much energy away from my creative work and I decided to stop working as a teacher.

It's true, as an Italian-Ladino I find myself on the natural border between Italy and German-speaking countries. It's natural here to absorb all the *stimuli* from across the border and these have a positive impact on one's being receptive to cultural influences.

LF: In recent years the visual image evoked by your sculptures has been very homogeneous and recognisable, as if you had in mind a clear direction towards which you were working. How do you create your images?

GD: I get the idea for my sculptures from very different situations!! I am fascinated by a whole series of child and adult attitudes and behaviours. Many of their attitudes seem mysterious, almost incomprehensible, and they capture my imagination, which is constantly seeking likenesses and contrasts. So I find myself with notes and sketches all over the place, on pieces of paper, on notes in my pocket, in books and in my diary. I build and sculpt the sculpture directly from the drawing and often a written thought is the starting point for various subjects. When I look at the photographs of my sculptures, I realise that my stile

has a clear continuity of thought. But the incredible thing is that even after I have finished a work, I continue to think about it and want to develop it.

LF: Looking at your work, the famous episode of Elias Canetti's childhood came to mind, which he mentions in his autobiography (*Die Gerettete Zunge*). In that book Canetti describes all the suffering and psychological malaise he felt because of having to learn German in a few weeks, with his mother's teaching methods, which were so severe as to seem almost cruel. It seems to me that your adolescents evoke this atmosphere of suffering and impotence, translating it into absolute rebellion, or at least absence of appeasement.

44 GD: My subjects transmit the awareness of becoming adults and thus losing, as Rudolf Steiner says, their ability to be able to "hear" their unconscious. They live with the burden of guilt transmitted from generation to generation, which does not belong to them. They are children who feel sad about not being able to really be children, but who have, on the other hand, the possibility of choosing to become adults, totally independently, thus freeing themselves little by little of all the influences transmitted by their ancestors. They are witness to all the effort involved in the process of growth and development, which is achieved through individual will and concentration.

LF: Your sculptures in fact function according to a precise schism, between the infantile purity of a child and the responsibility of those who have become adults and therefore able to do evil knowingly. Modern German philosophy defined theodicy the serious problem of how to justify the existence of God against the omnipresence of evil. Your sculptures seem to question the origins of evil, through a disquiet that is evoked in their posture, in their facial expressions and in their movements.

GD: Yes! Children ask themselves about the origin of evil and certain behaviours, and they are aware they will lose their instinctive perception as they become adults. However, they know they will also acquire the ability to control their own reality. I feel that when Bois Groys said "we are a museum of geniuses", this can be applied to children of no more than 8 years of age. This is why I am particularly attracted by the fertility of human beings during infancy, when their character has not been defined and everything seems fluid and possible.

LF: Talking about character, when I looked at some of the sculptures of boys I thought I saw Oskar Matzerath in them, the main character in *The Tin Drum* by Gunter Grass. At a young age Oskar decides to stop growing to thwart his parents' plans for him and to avoid the moral degradation he perceives as being the consequence of becoming adult. His total rebellion is above all physical: his body remains that of a boy and he only grows in his imagination, in his cunning and in his lucid and sharp sarcasm. Your adolescents are also much more adult than they actually appear. They also seem to have reached the irrevocable decision to flee from a precise destiny and oppose it with the independent force of



their own will. Your work thus seems to be a deep reflection on the notion of appearance. What appears to us in a certain way is actually very different from how it appears. What seems infantile is instead already adult and there is a risk that one notices this too late.

GD: Yes, I play with this idea and enjoy making my sculptures appear as real individuals. In certain positions, I bring together elements of the child and of the adult in their hands or shoulders, confusing the spectator about whether they are looking at a child or an adult and the true nature of the sculpture. The brusque transition from being a child, when you are forgiven for your attitudes and indulged for your play-acting, to being an adult with all the responsibilities and duties of adulthood, was a keen experience during my childhood.

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LF: There is a theoretical awareness of twentieth century pedagogy that recurs in your work and in what you say. What is the autobiographical meaning of all this? As you work on your sculptures, are you also working through your own personal development, your past and your memories?

GD: Absolutely. I have always sought answers to what I remember as the most difficult and mysterious moments of my childhood in my studies and my reading. More often than not, however, I have found the answers to my doubts in the history of my ancestors. In this way, I like to think that the internal dialogues I had as a child were not in total solitude but were a form of conversation with another world.

LF: I think it is safe to say that your work belies a distancing from contemporary society, from its ways, its styles and from a certain vacuity. You dissociate yourself from thoughts and behaviours that your subjects seem to ridicule and condemn. One could talk about an awareness of the outdatedness of your subjects, to use an expression dear to Nietzsche. Outdatedness as a form of criticism, of distancing one from current reality and of a desire to be different. How interested are you in directly transmitting notions of social criticism?

GD: If there is any notion of criticism it is definitely one of not wanting to sculpt children as if they were taken from a current fashion magazine. I am interested in another level of analysis, where the superficial gloss of the image doesn't count but rather the understanding of the deep roots of my subjects, those roots that make them act and be in a certain way.

LF: Canetti comes to mind again. In his autobiography he remembers how he was fascinated by Fritz Wotruba's sculptures. Wotruba sculpted stone, seeking synthesis and intuition with and in that hostile and difficult material. I remember this, because for some years now people have been talking about "light sculptures", almost as if they wanted to disassociate their own work from the idea of heavy material, perceived as being anachronistic, of belonging to modernism, a movement that is now very much over. Your sculpture is clearly in line with tradition but it also evokes an idea of lightness through the use of the wood



you use and the unfinished nature of the subjects. So your subjects seem to be suspended between these two different and opposing souls, ancient and modern, heavy and light. What relationship do you have with the sculptural tradition of the twentieth century?

GD: My sculptures are made piece by piece and the building up of the wooden elements I use recalls the logic used in it. This sort of process lets me add things and sculpt, take things away and sculpt, with the advantage over traditional sculpture. When I began to sculpt, I concentrated on Gothic and Baroque artists, such as Veit StoB, Riemenschneider and Ignaz Gunther. Their influence is still present in my work to some extent.

52 LF: Your characters seem to be suspended between two dimensions, emptiness and fullness, like forms that are traced and unresolved. The gaps and the missing parts all make up the outlines of bodies that are escaping, not finite and not mysterious. When will you decide to interpret your work symbolically? What sort of level of interpretation do you think people looking at your work have?

GD: I think that the fullness and emptiness found in my sculptures reflect each individual's balance. Each individual is made up of different "modules" that are involved in the quest for completeness. I transfer this thought to my subjects, and let them be complete when I feel they are.

Sometimes I insert special elements and colours, to influence or suggest the order people should look at them. I am aware that there will never be total harmony between my thoughts and those of others, but I find each observation is enchanting. My greatest ambition is to start a dialogue between my sculptures and those who look at them.

LF: I find your thoughts concerning time fundamental to your work. The use of modules and segments is a perfect visual metaphor for the sense of time, its passing, its imperceptible stratification and the changes that it brings about in all of us, year after year. All your children seem to emanate a crystallised melancholy.

GD: The melancholy and severity in their facial expressions belies the sense of malaise they are experiencing. But alongside these feelings, I have also strived to bring out the full awareness of these children, the certainty they have in their choices and in the consequences of their choices.

LF: A historical dimension appears in your most recent works in a rather direct and explosive way. You are producing portraits of child-adults of epoch-making twentieth century icons, from Hitler to Mao. The features of these child-adults contain allusions to the historical figures but are clearly recognisable. They seem to incarnate the fixed nature of their own destiny, as if history was something that has already been written, as if there were no possible alternatives.

How do you explain these works? What do you think is the difference between them and your previous work, whose identities were not recognisable and therefore with whom any of us could potentially identify?



GD: The spectator establishes a very direct relationship with the historical figure they find themselves observing at eye level, while being aware that they are actually looking at a child. Does one concentrate more on the weak and fragile child, with its narrow shoulders and inward bent knees, or does one acknowledge it immediately as a future dictator that should be found guilty and condemned prematurely? Does a judgmental attitude towards the historical figure or compassion for the child prevail? I enjoy watching this antithetical comparison between logic and habit? As the size of the subject has been reduced, so has its guilt. But is reducing it to this size enough to make people see it only as an innocent child?

LF: In what way do you emphasise how identity is an ambivalent and ephemeral quality, and so difficult to define? Are there any artists whose work you are following at the moment and that you find stimulating and inspiring?

GD: There are various artists I feel an affinity with and respect. I like the work

of Neo Rauch, Michael Borremans and Gottfried Helnwein. Their paintings depict a narrative that is complex and never unequivocally defined, one that is open to a multiplicity of interpretations. I very much appreciate the formal rigour and the remarkable technical skills with which Borremans and Rauch paint.

LF: I am curious to find out if you have future projects in mind, ideas which you haven't managed to put into practice yet or which you don't feel ready to begin.

GD: I would like to pick up certain studies and ideas from where I left off some years ago and rethink them in today's world. I am interested in diversity and the conceptual comparison between materiality and transparency, in a figurative sense. I see them as being homogeneous. I am using materials new to my work.

54 The potential of transparency can transmit a new organic quality to my sculptures, softening the hardness of the wood.

LF: Materiality and transparency seem to me to be two terms that are conceptually perfect to summarise your work to date. They synthetically express what we said before about the relationship between tradition and innovation, between the solidity of the materials you use to make your children and the non-finite transparency that is their ultimate quality. In this way, materiality and transparency could also allude to the radical ontological diversity between adulthood and childhood: the definitive "heaviness" of adulthood, that can no longer be reshaped, and the "transparent" lightness of childhood, as a space of possibilities, open to a multiplicity of influences and variations. There is an oscillation between these two moments, a polarity that your work crystallises symbolically. Perhaps this unresolved oscillation is the best approach to an understanding of your work.

And I think this is an excellent point to end our conversation.



Look now father!, 2007, wood / legno / Holz, 49,5 x 12,7 x 12 cm

Look now father!, 2006, wood / legno / Holz, 167 x 38 x 35 cm

