

DON VAN VLIET

Galerie Michael Werner Berlin

At the suggestion of A.R. Penck, Don Van Vliet (1941-2010) is appearing at Galerie Michael Werner. The east German artist wants at long last to meet the originator of the legendary 1969 double LP *Trout Mask Replica* and encounters a US painter who conducts his brush with the same disciplined groove as he did his band. The Californian embodies the refined instinctive mindset that A.R. Penck considers the contemporary shape of genius. In the world of music, Van Vliet aka Captain Beefheart took that traditional North American path that combines Blues and avantgarde Rock. His path to painting, by contrast, reflects Nordic Modernism in Europe. The “Van” in his name as a painter is something he borrows from the one in van Gogh’s name. What he admires is the latter’s artistic stance: Like van Gogh, Van Vliet is a self-taught painter and has thus avoided getting caught up in the tug of the mainstream. His school friend Frank Zappa was in fact offered a scholarship for the applied arts while still a child as his sculptures and drawings of animals were so convincing. Initially, painting was simply something that accompanied Van Vliet on his music career. In-between tours and rehearsals he picked up as brush, and even has gone so far as to produce portraits of his band members while on stage whenever he has stopped acting as leader of the band. His took his decision to dedicate himself exclusively to music in the mid-1980s at the time when he first met A.R. Penck and the other artists at Galerie Werner. Van Vliet, who grew up in the Mojave Desert, and lives with his wife Janet in the solitude of North California’s Humboldt Bay, has dared to create something new. Because in the USA painting has otherwise been a phenomenon of urbanity and gets explored and structured in the blaring streets of art-hub New York. Van Vliet, by contrast, reactivates the creative power of the desert, in whose silent surroundings humans encounter not only coyotes, crows, rattlesnakes, and the wind, but also themselves. There, existence is expressed in the groove of our ur-language: “...liddle wijjough widdlewilüü badidlidl widuhwwuhh...”. Van Vliet is a fluent past master in this ur-language – and it is mirrored in his painting. A.R. Penck considers the sensitivity to this to be “very American, very Western, and very modern”. The Californian’s paintings show how the freedom afforded by the US right to bear arms extends to the right to put brush and paint to canvas.

The exhibition *Don Van Vliet* opens on Friday, July 5, 2024, from 6 to 9 p.m. and will run until August 31, 2024 at Galerie Michael Werner Berlin, Germany.