

Interview with Arno Oehri

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Alma Mater -- Alma Pater: Liechtensteiner Artist on Broadway

This Saturday, 4 April 1992, the Liechtensteiner artist Arno Oehri will open his first exhibit in New York. The Foster Goldstrom Gallery is showing some of the artist's most recent works. A live performance of the artist is scheduled for 25 April 1992.

Arno Oehri has been living and working in New York for little over a year. The Cultural Advisory Board of the Liechtenstein Government granted him a one-year stipend in 1991 which he used to settle in New York and immerse himself in the city's vibrant art scene. "I felt that the time had come for me to quit working in my secluded studio and expose myself to an art scene in which new things are created every day. I wanted to find out if my own work could measure up to this competition. It was a great challenge for me to enter my own work into this competition. I hoped to be able to grow artistically in this challenging environment."

Indeed, Arno Oehri was not overwhelmed by the multiple challenge New York had in store for him. Instead the challenge was very inspiring and the year turned out to be a very productive one. "New York offers tremendous diversity," Arno Oehri explains. There are so many different cultures, so much energy. Consequently, you can also find a great variety of artistic expressions, not just in the fine arts, but also in literature and music. All this is potentially very inspiring, but there is also the danger to get lost. Or you can float with the mainstream and get washed away by the rapidly changing trends."

Arno Oehri's recent paintings are strikingly fine and contemplative. They are in stark contrast to the hectic and noisy life in New York.

"Living in New York forced me to counteract this hectic existence. I had to explore life behind this hectic everyday activity. My themes are timeless; they deal with psychological, philosophical, spiritual or religious ideas. In alchemy I found a particularly fascinating constellation of such timeless concepts. The Latin sentence fragments in my paintings are taken from medieval alchemical texts. I began reading such texts, then I isolated concepts and formulas and took them out of their historical contexts. In my paintings I try to link these old concepts and formulas to our contemporary life. I don't want to merely dig up and repeat old

ideas; much rather I try to reinterpret timeless questions and themes. Truth is not simple or stable. We need to reinterpret truth constantly. I want my work to come as close as possible to the truth. My 'personal truth' is my contribution to and, I hope, enrichment of our lives. As a painter I see myself as an alchemist in a quite romantic sense. Via inspiration I take concepts and ideas and transform them in my laboratory/studio into material, concretely perceptible objects."

Arno Oehri's near future will be determined by the outcome of the exhibit on Broadway. New York is a tough and expensive place to live in.

"I would like to stay here and continue working," Arno explains. The exhibit is my debut in the international art scene, and I would like to establish myself in it. This is my first chance. We will see."