

SCHUEBBE PROJECTS: CHRISTIAN SCHOELER

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INSIDE

Christian Schoeler

Benedikt I

(Detail shot from artist studio)

2010

Mixed media and oil on canvas

mounted on wood

100 x 185 cm

ABOUT GENDER AND TEMPORALITY IN CHRISTIAN SCHOELER'S WORK

By Alice Pfeiffer

Nietzsche once described the human being as "*das noch nicht festgestellte Tier*", the unfinished creature, one in a constant state of learning and transience. "There are no natural men, because we live in a cultural world," he wrote, suggesting that this very process of learning is one dictated by exterior norms rather than an inborn essence.

As a child grows up, he learns to say 'I am a boy' as well as 'I am three': because one's experience of time is an embodied one, time and gender become inseparable and mutually validating; our passing through life is dictated and fragmented by a gender-time normativity – which can often be in discordance with the inherent self and personal development.

Masculinity, growing up into a sexualized adult self, and the clash between the natural and the cultural is at the core of Christian Schoeler's work.

Schoeler starts by creating a de-temporalized space, both in content and in style:

He chooses models that are purposely far from contemporary stereotypes of masculine beauty. He then places them in a non-urban environment, one that the viewer cannot date nor situate, such as the countryside or an intimate space. This choice of scenery is not only a reference to 19th century academic portraiture à la John Singer Sargeant; it is also a symbolic removal of the subject from society. The classical style, far, far from hip contemporary art, as well as the naked surroundings contribute to creating a time-less space, a paradigm about the inner self that might ring true to all males.

The models always seem captured in an intimate moment: rather than an official sit-down portrait, Schoeler captures a moment gone by in a second, that one might miss. In grand oil paintings, or airy watercolours that feel like a breath on piece of paper, he depicts the frail, transient space between teenage years and adulthood. By depicting a metaphorical secret garden, he encourages the viewer to focus on one's inner self, away from a social '*diktat*'.

Whilst the boys appear effeminate and gentle, this a reminder that masculinity doesn't necessarily entail normalized macho behavior – and that many men, if shielded from social obligations would be less inclined to expose hunter-gatherer masculinity.

It is important to note that Schoeler's work is in no way of a sexual origin. Whilst the portraits are of the models they certainly aren't about them – rather, they are used as means of self-analysis by the painter, a projection of his inner struggle growing up in a conventionalized adulthood.

Whilst increasingly today, Schoeler's name is associated with barrier-breaking gay artists such as David Hockney and Rainer Fetting, the former differs in one radical way: he is a gender artist, not a homosexual artist. His battle lies in the defeating the obligation to conform to standardized masculinity.

"The body itself is a construction, as as the myriad of bodies that constitute the domain of gendered subjects." wrote Judith Butler, the matron all gender turmoil, "gender is a relation."