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Auction The Kasper König Collection - His Private Choice

Date 01.10.2024, ca. 18:41

WESLEY, JOHN
1928 Los Angeles - 2022 New York

Title: Untitled (Donald Duck).
Date: 1969.
Technique: Oil on canvas.
Measurement: 51 x 123cm.

Provenance:
- Kasper König Collection, Berlin (directly from the artist)

Exhibitions:
- Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin 2018

In the spectrum of Pop Art and Minimal Art

After working as an illustrator for the translation of building plans into drawings in Los Angeles, the American painter John Wesley moves to New York and dives into the art scene. Donald Judd reviewed his exhibitions positively and the comic-like depictions of people, animals and everyday objects initially categorised Wesley as Pop Art. At the same time, the motifs of the light blue and pink paintings are interspersed with pattern-like repetitions that bring his work closer to Minimalism. A precise categorisation is not possible due to his stylistic uniqueness.

The beginning of a friendship

By chance, Wesley and the German curator Kasper König became friends in New York: König visited the painter Jo Baer in her studio and noticed that the delicate blue and pink pastel colours she used could also be found in a painter's work at the Robert Elkon Gallery, but König could no longer remember the artist's name. Baer tells him that it is her husband. König visits Wesley in his studio and is fascinated by the works, which surreally combine sexuality, pop culture and everyday objects. König summarises Wesley's work as follows: 'He subtly addresses extreme taboos and breaks them without being superficial.' (translated) König's depictions of naked bodies and comic figures are reminiscent of figurative medical instructions from his youth and he describes a scene 'that depicts in a very technical way how Donald Duck is born. [...] John transfers this objective style to a completely recumbent figure who is not pregnant at all, but nevertheless gives birth to Donald Duck - that's pretty nasty' (translated).

The subconscious in absurdity

The 1969 painting mentioned by König comes from his own collection. A naked woman lying in profile has her arms crossed over her upper body and turns her face towards the viewer with her eyes closed. In the left half of the picture, the cartoon duck Donald Duck is born between her bent legs with his arm outstretched. The flesh-coloured body and the white duck created by Walt Disney stand in stark contrast to the reduced baby blue background and make the situation appear sober rather than threatening. In the curator's collection there is a variant of the subject that replaces the duck with a rabbit and frames the nude depiction with rabbits in profile (lot 240). The absurdity as well as the humorous realisation also fascinated König: 'On the other hand, the works have something psychological about them - his pictures, which refer to comic myths, seem to be absorbed [...] even in fractions of a second. Afterwards, something like an afterimage forms in your head, which then occupies you psychologically because it evokes something in the back of your mind, in your subconscious. And I think the colour is crucial in this respect' (translated).

Estimate: 60.000 € - 80.000 €

