

# Stephen Friedman Gallery

Luxemburg Times

Far-fetched, pedantic, or straight up crazy?

Michael Reinertz

19 June 2020

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Mudam exhibition from Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn is critique of globalisation



Photo: MUDAM

Is globalisation a productive force or a destructive one? Or both at the same time? Such is the dizzying dialectic Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn raises in a new exhibition.

Hirschhorn, born in the Swiss capital Berne in 1957, has accrued numerous prestigious awards throughout his career, yet his work is relatively modest, aiming at what he calls a “non-exclusive public”.

Using a collection of unassuming materials — such as cardboard, wood, foil, tape and newspaper clippings — Hirschhorn’s art is at once intensely political and disarming. His work *Flugplatz Welt/ World Airport* - currently on exhibit in the MUDAM - is no exception.

Jam-packed with cardboard airplanes, bulletin boards, literature and commercial refuse, *Flugplatz Welt/ World Airport* feels like walking into a diorama of global capitalism.

Plastered from wall to wall with newspaper clippings, philosophical texts and commercial symbols, Hirschhorn has constructed a vast web of semiology that seems to point everywhere and nowhere all at once.

The seemingly disparate elements in Hirschhorn’s exhibition are all connected to a central runway through a sprawling network of transparent tape. Here, a fleet of international flag carriers (i.e. Air France, Swiss Air, etc.) sit poised on a sheet of reflective tinfoil.

“*Flugplatz Welt/ World Airport* can be taken as nothing more than a grown man’s box fort built on Red Bull and Adderall

The spindly lengths of tape, along with the crisp aluminium and bright halogen bulbs that deck the entire exhibition, give Hirschhorn’s work a sense of charged conductivity that is, at once, organic and artificial.

As one follows a strand of tape from an oversized Nike sneaker to a bulletin board bearing news-snippets covering the armed conflict in Kosovo, to a cardboard replica of an Alitalia aircraft, there is a certain schizophrenic harmony—a half-crazed connection reminiscent of a Thomas Pynchon novel.

This conspiratorial edge is, surprisingly, the most disarming element in Hirschhorn’s work, as it invites viewers to freely lend or withhold credence from his work.

*Flugplatz Welt/ World Airport* can be taken as nothing more than a grown man’s box fort built on Red Bull and Adderall, or a jarring commentary on globalism.

In the midst of his complex network, Hirschhorn slowly peels back capitalism’s elusive Gestalt, shedding its parts until nothing else is left than a collection of empty, cardboard shells.

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Throughout the exhibition there are recurring photographs of two young men captured in mid-flight as they jump off a wall with arms spread wide at shoulder height. As they hover above a swathe of cardboard—placed beneath them to break their fall—they can be seen wearing tin foil hats and 90s style clothing with recognizable branding.

Besides their obvious imitation of airplanes, the tinfoil hats stand out as a focal point connecting these young men to the network of Hirschhorn's work.

Just as with the sovereign states, these boys embody themselves as flag carriers for the exchange of capital and culture—they themselves become set-pieces in a network that transcends the seemingly inane network of cardboard, tinfoil and Nike shoes that surround them.

While this may all sound slightly farfetched, pedantic or straight up crazy, this is the sort of off-the-wall reading that Hirschhorn's work invites as it deftly walks the line of art and politics.