

A fondness for warm shades of brown

On Thomas Rentmeister, Nutella and making little dollops in art gallerien

Text SILKE HOHMANN

It's hard to believe someone who has stood ankle-deep in Nutella and claims that what interests him the most is the colour and texture of the substance. After all, we're talking about a substance that some people make a beeline for with spoon in hand. Wading through a sea of Nutella ranks just below being locked in an ice-cream parlour overnight in the list of all-time greatest unfulfilled desires. And it's not difficult to find someone who will agree that their supply of Nutella is directly linked to their sense of personal wellbeing. Where there is Nutella, all is well with the world.

Thomas Rentmeister has been playing around in this material with hands and feet in a bid to create beautiful structures - after which he came to the realisation that "You can't make a mountain out of it", even with several tons of the stuff. For this artist, the chocolate paste is simply a medium like any other. "I treat it objectively," he says, knowing full well that the observer certainly cannot. Nutella is a substance that brings forth personal stories: about a person's own desires, predilections and memories, but also about what is in the normal scheme of things and what is not. When the chocolate spread leaves the jar and is suddenly poured over the floor in never-before-seen quantities, as in Thomas Rentmeister's installations, something is suddenly out of kilter. Circumstances are no longer normal, and even the desire to stock up your shelf is rocked to its foundations.

Apart from his fondness for all warm shades of brown, from light caramel to dark espresso, Thomas Rentmeister has his unusual choice of medium to thank for an idea that hangs together with cultural activity itself. In the 1990s, when high-gloss photography behind Plexiglas was selling like hot-cakes at art fairs, Thomas Rentmeister wanted to exhibit something that could not be shoved under your arm and taken home. With his breakfast knife he coated a small bookshelf with Nutella, and this first example of distancing an object from its normal purpose gave birth to a fascination with the 'pure material in pure quantity', as he describes it. He daubs it on pillars, distributes it around art galleries in little dollops and spills it in unexpected surroundings. Thomas Rentmeister finds interesting the apparent contradiction that the substance of which sweet dreams are made, in the form of his sculptures, can seem to us like an undesirable mess. Yet when the observer, with relief, realises that the substance in question is actually Nutella, the connection that Thomas Rentmeister weaves between his audience and the odd, somehow incomparable medium still isn't at an end. Just as the adverts told us over the decades that Nutella is good for iron deficiency and gives you energy, it's equally true that the material is a storage medium for our own stories - a hoard that makes for unhappiness as soon as it's used up.



untitled, 2001, polyester resin, 53 x 96 x 51 cm, edition: 5,1 ap
Photo UWE SEYL



untitled, 1994
polyester resin, 31 x 47 x 42 cm, edition: 5,1 ap
Photo JÖRG HEJKAL



untitled, 2000, Nutella nut-nougat spread, approx. 30 x 350 x 150 cm
Photo JÖRG HEJKAL