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## **CHECKPOINT ILGEN #5**

### **Introduction**

October 24<sup>th</sup> 2008

Dear guestes, dear friends,

In name of my wife Jacqueline and the 'Checkpoint Ilgen' team we like to welcome you. A special welcome is of course for Tom Messer, for Mayen Beckmann and Nicola Bscher, Hiroshi and Hiromi Senju, Megan Craig and Nick Lloyd, and not in the least Ulla and heiner Pietzsch! Besides, I welcome our guests who came espically from New York, Washington, Beverly Hills, Kyoto!

The reason for the support of this particular 'Checkpoint Ilgen#5' by Ulla and Heiner Pietzsch is understandable in the context that their collection is a first class witness of the natural flow of art history and the exchange between Europe and the USA, a fact which coincides with Tom's own ideas. This became quite clear when a few years ago their collection was exhibited at the Peggy Guggenheim Museum – actually mixed with the Peggy Guggenheim Collection.

I hope you can appreciate that I take advantage of the capacity that Tom speaks perfect German. Mrs.Pamela Biel will this time translate my German into English. At last 'Checkpoint Ilgen' some persons mentioned that simultaenous translation disturbs the natural flow of the dialogue. Unfortunately it is not possible differently when one wishes to continue to involve foreign guests - something which clearly is our intention.

We are quite happy that new guests have come to the 'Checkpoint Ilgen'! Therefore, I hope you do not mind that I briefly repeat something about the mission of the 'Checkpoint Ilgen' events.

Jacqueline and I initiated 'Checkpoint Ilgen' events as a modest enterprise to stimulate the thinking and hopefully real dialogue about the profound experience works of art offer us, regardless of any known classification and opposed to mere market-related concerns. Art should be experienced as it comes to our eyes and brain, regardless from what part of the world or from what religious or social or specific cultural backgrounds, even regardless from what period of time in human history. Yes, knowledge and learning are very important, but, no, they should not obstruct one's vision, one's 'immediate perception'. Knowledge and learning come next and help us understand and enhance our experience. Openness and curiosity are key!

First, I owe you a short explanation about the exhibited works or art. Jacqueline and I gladly continue to experiment with our 'Checkpoint Ilgen' series in direct relation to the specific theme. Hence, we are very pleased to be able to present to you the probably surprising combination of a fabulous Max Beckmann painting (to Tom the period of German Expressionism is very important as an art historical phenomenon), with a few works by the leading Japanese star artist Hiroshi Senju (Tom has specific interests in Japan, he is in the Board of Isamu Noguchi Foundation in New York), and Megan Craig's talented painting (her painting has some analogies with various painters Tom really likes, for instance with Munch, though the themes are quite different). I like to add that we are very proud to present to you Hiroshi Senju, because he is almost impossible to 'catch' – he is after all also President of the important Kyoto University of Art and Design, and is continuously presented at biennales and museums. Besides, Megan Craig is also Assistant Professor for painting and Philosophy at Stony Brook University. Her book on the philosopher Levinas will be released soon, involving some discussion of works by Guston. We have been able to introduce Megan for

an exhibition at the Kunstverein Graftschaft Neuenhaus a couple of years ago. This is still the Berlin premiere for both artists.

Ladies and gentlemen, like you know, museums play a key role in international art history. You also will be familiar with the continuous struggle for survival of the museums and that, therefore, their need for sufficient budgets in the last decade has led to big changes in the programming of these museums and in the profile-descriptions of museum directors. You will also know that both have led in the end - and unfortunately so – to the the impression as if the financial streams are more important than the selection of works of art. This makes the discussion, if museums should continue like this, if they have any option to do it differently, if the mission and purpose of museums should change soon. Not in the least because soon the new Director of the Solomon R.Guggenheim Foundation will be appointed. Certainly also in context to the extensive economic changes evolving in today's world – I do not merely mean the current crisis-sentiments (banks after all are of course crucial cultural promoters), but more the involvement of new economic countries, especially the Middle East and Asia.

Therefore, it is a great honour to have Tom Messr as our guest, but it is also of actual current importance to have a discussion with one of the most important specialists, who basically witnessed the birth of the museum for contemporary art as we know it today, and as important director for almost 30 years everyday had to consider how to respond to the changes of the time – without losing sight of the meaning of arthistory and the development of art.

During my talk with Tom you will be able to conclude by yourself why Tom was such an exceptional mudeum director and still is a specialist in this field. To me personally Tom is so important because quite clearly he does not wish to put his own personality central stage but works of art and artists about whom, after careful consideration and research, he decided they deserve more attention by a wider audience. It should also be emphasized that though Tom indeed was active as director for the Solomon R.Guggenheim Foundation, his accomplishments before and after the Guggenheim are just as important. A summarized biography you will have read in the informationletter accompanying our invitation – including the reference to the outstanding interview with tom by Andrew Decker (of which a part happened exactly 14 years ago on October 24<sup>th</sup>...) - supported by the Guggenheim Museum NYC, on our wall you will find a list of all catalogues published during his directorate in context to the exhibitions. Additionally you see some pictures of various activities of Tom, including the books on Kandinsky and Munch, and the catalogue of the Frankfurt exhibition of Chillida.

My talk with Tom is divided in 4 parts:

1. summary of his life 1920 until about 1960 – especially his activities for the American Federation of the Arts – an organization not so known here;
2. Director Solomon R.Guggenheim Foundation, 1961-1988, including the acquisition of the Thannhauser Collection, the Hilla von Rebay Foundation, the Peggy Guggenheim Collection;
3. his activities after the Guggenheim period;
4. his opinions and views concerning the present situation and possible considerations for the museum of the future;

Now I am excited to start my talk with the man who not without humor likes to emphasize he is one of the very few museum directors who has never dismissed.

Fré Ilgen