

Scattered Units

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Neo Rauch's paintings have occupied a unique position in contemporary art for quite a while. Nowhere else can be found such a paradoxical kind of chronicling, a way of working with presumably obsolete tools that nevertheless reveals and creates contemporary resonance. Just as rare is the way Rauch merges issues concerning painting with narrative strategies; the former reflects the enormous tradition of the genre, including each time it has been pronounced dead, and the latter seems to belong more to the novel and film. Yet what stands out most of all is Rauch's visual power of imagination, with which he combines the obvious with the shadowy, the recognizable with the incomprehensible, and forms dissonant units, thus transferring a lasting remembrance to the viewer's visual store of memories. This integrative quality, which underlies all parts of his handmade, unique pieces, resists being quickly consumed. Instead, it seizes the viewer with the disturbing restlessness of an insoluble riddle. At the same time, however, this visual world appears highly familiar, offering a sense of possibilities saturated with reality; one has the feeling one recognizes the scenes, protagonists, and props, seemingly taken from a storehouse of pattern books, posters, and comic books of past eras and fashions. An exciting interplay between fiction and experience therefore dominates the tableaux, sealing the visible surfaces with a patina of hidden meaning and, in a counter move, giving different potential meanings perceptible form. However, the author directing this visual composition remains unidentifiable as a person; instead of himself, he sends his imaginary creatures into the bonfire of activity, the crisis of creativity, the classic battle of surfaces. Instead of succumbing to the fervor of a message, he organizes his material according to the requirements of the medium, and, as a result of reflecting upon the narrative, always achieves its rhythm, its beat.

Among the large-format works on paper, which were done during the past two years and will be presented in their entirety at the Albertina in Vienna, are the works *Amt* (cat. 7) and *Pfad* (cat. 4), which especially exemplify the above. As always with Rauch's work, the first impression is meant to be a comprehensive one. It should not entice the viewer too rapidly into considering each of the various journeys and threads of activities shown, but