What is Reality?

Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and the artist Karin Kneffel on the deconstruction of the familiar as liberation from determination

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"I want spaces and times, present and past to merge in my paintings. What is reality, what is fiction, where does pictorial reality begin?"
Karin Kneffel (Voss 2019, 91, trans. M.S.)

Abstract

What is reality? It is postmodern or poststructuralist philosophers like Roland Barthes, who realized that it only seems that the media present reality in the form of facts, because they actually spread myths. Accordingly, Jacques Derrida made it clear that communication via media is not based on logic, but is characterized by a significant "différance" between a "marque" (trace) of the past and the expectations of the future. Both agreed, that the initial misunderstanding of the concept of reality must be uncovered or "deconstructed". This is more than necessary for them, because media, be it pictures or language, in truth convey values that are culturally and socially significant. They 'iterate' these values subliminally, because what shows up are only placeholders and thus mere forms ("structures of graphematic") that are superficially realised as facts ("stereotypes"). In this way, according to Barthes, we all accept without question the values hidden behind them, so that they can gain a normative power that unconsciously guides our thinking, our decisions and our actions. Afterwards, it is Judith Butler who critically asked: How can we ever escape from this? Given the power of the subliminal dominant discourses, she saw the only effective solution "im Umdeuten" (in reinterpretation) of their subliminal values. In order to finally escape this "parasitic existence at the ritual", the media philosopher Walter Benjamin already suggested to trigger "Chockwirkungen" (shock effects) in the viewer. It is the German painter Karin Kneffel, so it shall be shown, who has realized this with her series Fruits and Interiors in the most beautiful photorealistic strategy.

A descriptive introduction: Karin Kneffel's series of *Fruits* and the deconstruction of the familiar

What about Karin Kneffel's series of Fruits, with which the artist first attracted attention on the art scene at the end of the 1990s? (Fig. 1-3) Why is it so irritating? This impression, which only arises at second glance, is in clear contradiction to the artist's works, which at first glance appear photorealistically correct and can be described as beautiful in the classical sense. The perfection of these classical paintings in oil on canvas was created in many long hours, preferably night after night, with a very narrow brush in several layers on top of each other and partly in clearly larger-than-life formats of up to 7.10 by 4.20 meters, which usually hang high above the viewer. (Cf. cataloque, Kneffel 2019; texts in cataloque and press cf. Kneffel 2020, cf. summarizing Wedewer 2008, cf. style of painting Voss 2019, 91-94)

So, what is so irritating about the extremely precisely painted Fruits? Looking closer on the peaches (fig. 1), it quickly becomes clear that the trigger for this lies in the overexcitation of our senses. So, we are struck by the strong perceivable velvety soft material quality of them with their flawless surfaces, and thus they suddenly appear too intensive. In addition, the branches on which they hang are confusing; on closer inspection, their smooth surfaces make them look artificial rather than natural. This last effect is supported by the rich shade of blue in the background, which shimmers lighter and darker in places that also contrasts brightly with the orange tones of the fruits. This is irritating, too.

The numerous variations of grapes, apples, cherries and plums from this series repeat and confirm this impression. In addition, these deviations are reinforced by the fact that they all have no connection to everyday life. Thus, the grapes in figure 2 seem to float as isolated fruiting bodies in front of a flat brown ground, independent of the space and time of the observer, or, in contrast, as in figure 3, they spread out on the surface without any background. The latter are thus lost in the composition of a so-called ´allover´. Nevertheless, even without any reference to the here and now, their impressive presence as realistic, apparently tangible, beautiful fruit is preserved in both variations. In addition, especially in the last picture, the colourful, densely packed grapes seem so artificial that we begin to have doubts. Are they perhaps just colourful balloons hanging next to each other? To the question of what is real here, only one answer seems possible: everything – and then another equally unequivocal answer follows: nothing. This confuses. What is wrong here and why? What is really at stake here?



Figure 1: untitled (peaches,) 1996, four-part,
oil on canvas, 7,10 x 2,40m, KfW Stiftung Frankfurt a.M.



Figure 2: untitled (grapes), 1998, oil on canvas, 3,00 x 2,00 m,
DZ Bank, Kunstsammlung Düsseldorf



Figure 3: untitled (grapes), 2004, oil on canvas,
2,40 x 2,00 m, Museum Frieder Burda Baden-Baden

What is Reality?

Answers of postmodern philosophy

Summarizing, it is precisely by overemphasizing space, surfaces and bodies in these spatially or flatly organized large-sized compositions and by using bright colours, that Karin Kneffel disconnects her motifs form the real time and the real space of the viewer. Instead, the feeling of closeness is massively intensified, the motifs seem to jump into our faces. This procedure makes it clear that although the motifs are realistic, their being is roughly separated from our everyday life by the artist´s artistic strategies. It is noteworthy that exactly this very subject of Karin Kneffel was in the focus of postmodernity in the 80s and 90s. In addition, Karin Kneffel studied philosophy and German studies herself at the beginning of her career, then switched to fine arts and in the 90s and later became a master student of Gerhard Richter in Düsseldorf. She therefore knows the philosophical questions of postmodernism, as she personally confirmed in an interview on October 10, 2019. All the more reason to ask the question: what is at stake when Kneffel´s artefacts question our daily life and thus "deconstruct" it, as Jacques Derrida introduced as a method? Why does this seem important and what does it mean?

Answers to these questions are to be provided by discussing central positions of postmodern or poststructuralist philosophers, who are so called because of their research on the structures and media conditions of society. The positions of Roland Barthes' and Jacques Derrida´s are interesting in terms of content, those of Judith Butler because of their method. In the transition of the two, the approach of their predecessor Walter Benjamin proves to be revealing. In view of these approaches, the question is to become clearer as to what Karin Kneffel´s work is about. This is to be carried out by means of comparative analysis. Two series are to be examined more closely, the Fruits of the late 90s and the Interiors (self-chosen title) since 2009, both of which, like all her series, are still in development today.

Roland Barthes, "Mythologies" (1957)

Roland Barthes is one of the first to make a significant contribution to the study of postmodern age, 'avant la lettre'. (Cf. re. cultural studies, Grabbe, Rupert-Kruse 2009, 21-31) In his key book *Mythologies* form 1957, he spoke of facts, which precisely characterizes the everyday understanding of media, be it words or pictures, without us recognizing their subliminal meaning. (Cf. re. images, Jöckel 2018, 255-273) The Fruits of Karin Kneffel are a good example of this. Influenced by our everyday experiences, they too give us credible impressions of fruits that look exactly the way we think they should look, be it peaches, grapes, apples, plums or cherries. But Roland Barthes abandoned this idea by showing that what we see is never factual or neutral, but "mythologies". One of the best-known examples, with which he also presented his theoretical considerations on the subject, is the cover of the magazine *Paris Match* from June 1955 of a young black man in uniform saluting with a militarily greeting.



Figure 4: Cover, *Paris Match*, No. 326, 25th-26th June 1955
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mythologies_(book),
use Rationale for Roland Barthes "Mythologies", 1957

The underlying meaning of the motif seems obvious, it is about French sons who are loyal soldiers of the French Empire, 'la Grande Nation', regardless of their skin colour. The story behind this motif is rich, "it postulates a knowledge, a past, a memory, an ordered compilation of facts, ideas and decisions." (Barthes 2013 [1957] 262-267, cf. 262, transl. M.S.) Yet this richness and depth of meaning are lost at the moment it is presented on the cover of Paris Match, Barthes said. The meaning impoverished and lives on only as a stereotype. The inner meaning is still there, but the simplified composition can no longer represent it. The image is only a shell of it. It functions as a placeholder. In this respect, it is only a form that can speak of something completely different because of its openness. Hence, a new hidden meaning can emerge, said Barthes, which can take on the power of a truly great and long living mythology. In this way, a new meaning arises, based on the old one, namely that of an imperialist state. (269) The reduction of a previously valid, rich and varied meaning can be erased by simplifying it to a *mere* form, and thus creating space for a new powerful myth. The black soldier only serves as an alibi for this new myth: you see, we belong together, but we are still the masters, the image says. The French bourgeoisie, according to Barthes, has understood the message. For it represents their values and nourishes their natural self-image. That is the true intention and thus the purpose of the poster. It is intended to iterate the values and thus strengthen and consolidate them without being consciously perceived. As for the method, this is achieved through a simple process. An earlier rich motif is used and reduced to an empty slide or form for a new message. In this way the own values of the own imperial power can grow richly behind it.

In summary, Barthes noted that the myth plays with the analogy between meaning and form. It was therefore clear to him: "No myth without a motivated form." (Cf. 273, and see also, 288-294, trans. M.S.) It is remarkable that the new meaning is based on the old one, which gives the message the impression of a fact. The myth thus appears natural and rooted. This process is a form of "naturalization". (278-280) Instead of making obvious that the new message has an intention or purpose, it is hidden behind facts. Therefore, the message appears to be pure and innocent. This made it obvious to him, instead a value system, the picture belongs to a fact system. (270-271) The intention turns into something eternal that belongs to the natural order of facts. The innocence ahead, the black man is presented as a part of it. But reality is not like that, said Barthes, quoting Karl Marx: "Everything keeps its trace and thus its history, and thus the more or less imprinted presence of the human action, which is produced, used, subjected to or rejected." (249-316, cf. 296, and see also Marx 1969, 43, transl. M.S.)

It is this "naturalization" that Karin Kneffel takes up in her oeuvre. So, peaches or grapes are presented in the way we imagine them. They look according to our stereotypical image of them; their bodies are dimensioned and their surfaces "feel" that way. The fruits confirm our image of them in every respect: they are absolutely perfect and beautiful. The trace that Kneffel follows is that of an idealization that in reality does not match a real peach or grape as they naturally have discolorations or rotten spots.[1] As Barthes noted, (any) reality depends on variety, on different phenomena, states and conditions. The appearance of the fruits depends on the type, the places where it is grown and stored, the markets where it is sold and bought, and the conditions under which it is kept at home, as well as its ripeness and age, etc. So, when Karin Kneffel irritates us with her all too perfect and beautiful pictures of fruit, she takes us too far. We stop and start thinking. Using the artistic means of exaggerated idealization while at the same time omitting the real variety of fruits, Karin Kneffel makes us think about the ideal images we carry within us. After all, it is this ideal image that influences our decisions and our actions. In the shop and at the market we search for and buy the ideal, perfect peach or apple which can only be cultivated optimally and/or genetically manipulated to match.

Jacques Derrida, "Marque" (1968)

With regard to the history of postmodern or poststructuralist philosophy, it is Jacques Derrida for whom the term "marque" (trace) become central. What is said with this term corresponds to what Barthes already emphasized in reference to Marx. Thus, according to Derrida, what shows up to us carries the "marque" (trace) of the past and, in this respect, always intervenes in the future. It is part of the present and yet divorced from it. In conclusion, that what shows up is not real. (Derrida 1968, 17-19) He first presented this idea in 1968 in a lecture in Paris. It was influenced by the philosophy of Heidegger, Husserl, Nietzsche and Freud. Behind this philosophical background, it is the distinction between memory ("Retentionen", just-past) and expectations ("Protentionen", just-future) invented by Husserl that influenced Derrida. Moreover, it was Heidegger who showed Derrida that this distinction opens the discourse on the meaning of being or reality, which Heidegger discussed in 1927 in *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit)*. (Cf. 12-16, 20-34, see also on the connection of Husserl and Derrida, Gallagher 1992, 21-30, and Laner 2013, 129-138) Reality, Derrida concluded, thus can only be conceived as a "marque" (trace) of the before and the after. Derrida differentiated remotely that the ´meaning of the real´ that comes up with the "marque" (trace) is spatial through its emergence in the here and now and at the same time it is temporal through that what is actively penetrated by it. (13-19) In this respect, what shows up, is both passively suffered and actively processed. Jacques Derrida grasped this phenomenon as "différance", which in this case is written with an 'a' instead of 'e' in order to make clear the deviation from the French word 'différence'. That is important for him in order to clarify his both un-sensual and unintelligible character. (6-10)

What emerges is to be understood as an "iteration" as he described it in a lecture in Montreal in August 1971. Specifically, it is a meaning from the past, that is iterated and has the purpose "to secure the authority and power of a particular historical discourse." (Derrida 1976 [1971], 132-137, cf. 132, transl. M.S.) This statement by Derrida shows once again that these "marques" (traces) are not facts, but (socially and culturally significant) values, and they can be passed on in the writing and so it can be supplemented here in the image or all media. In this assumption he obviously meets Barthes´ definition of mythologies, because the ´mythologies´ are nothing else than values conveyed through images or media of all kinds. (Cf. concurring Sauer 2018 [2012]) In continuation of this connection

Derrida assumed that all communication via media only ever takes place in new and fragile contexts. In this respect, he saw it as a "performative statement". (Derrida 1971, 138-142) With the latter he took up a term from John Austin's speech act theory and at the same time differed from it by not understanding the performative utterance as one that succeeds ("illocution") or perhaps fails ("perlocution") and thus comes up from a determinable situation ("locution"), but grasped it as one that constantly moves in new contexts. (142-149, 153, cf. Austin 2018 [1962/1975]) This passing on of the statements is possible –and this is important– because that what they refer to is always absent. This connection is crucial for a better understanding of Kneffel's work. For even in her picture, for example of peaches (fig. 1), but also of grapes, apples, plums and cherries, the fruits are –unmistakably and thus actually– not really present. Their presence can only be seen with Derrida as a "marque" (trace). There is always a "dfférance". All communication, therefore, according to Derrida, has only a "graphematic" structure. It is only formal or form. In it, Derrida meets again with Barthes, who came to the same conclusion. (Derrida 1976 [1971], 137, 143, 151, see Barthes 2013 [1957], 262-267).

In summary, this means that against the background of the two approaches of postmodern thinkers, the peaches and all the other fruits that Kneffel paints, through their respective ´form´ only convey an image (an idea) of themselves as extremely perfect. With simplification or stereotyping, a kind of "deformation", the artist naturalizes the fruits with Barthes and presents them as self-evident facts. At the same time, this strategy allows to convey a new meaning: that of the ideal, normative beauty of fruit. Nevertheless, with Derrida it comes up, that these pictures already disclose the "différance" because they are just too perfect. This is exactly what triggers our irritation, as I described at the beginning.

Walter Benjamin, “Chockwirkungen” (1936)

In this context, and looking back on the history of philosophy, Walter Benjamin's remarks on the function and effects of the media in his well-known essay of 1936 on *Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility* take on a new meaning. (Benjamin 1977 [1936], 7-44) This is because Benjamin recognized, as I explained elsewhere and as Barthes and Derrida later confirmed, that we are not free in our dealing with the media. (Cf. Sauer 2010) According to Benjamin, we surrender ourselves entirely to their immediate effect on us and tend to consider what they show us to be true (keyword "Aura", cf. Benjamin 1977 [1936], 16-22). In this way, we do not distance ourselves from them, but move in the constant stream of values that they convey to us without being aware of them. It is against this background that Benjamin's strong demand to get rid of them can be explained. He said that this is urgently necessary to "liquidate the traditional value of cultural heritage" (14, trans. M.S.) in order to ultimately renounce the values that are passed on through them. According to him, this will only be successful, if we free ourselves form the „parasitic existence at the ritual” (17, transl. M.S.). But how? Benjamin himself hoped that the new media, in his time the film and the “Chockwirkungen” or shock effects that they have on us, could make this possible. Subsequent media theories proved, however, that the new media also do not allow us to distance ourselves from the values that are subliminally conveyed. (Sauer 2010, § 3-4)

With regard to Kneffel's works, however, it should be emphasized that they do not trigger any radical "Chockwirkungen" (shock effects). However, they irritate us enough to cause us to stop and think about what the artist is really showing us here. Finally, in the light of postmodern philosophy, it becomes clear that by presenting the Fruits in a simplified or stereotypical form and at the same time emphasizing their perfection, their normative power comes to the fore. In each version, the familiar subliminal message is conveyed and confirmed. It reads: peaches, grapes or apples should look exactly like this: perfect and beautiful. At the same time, the artist contradicts the message by irritating the viewer, telling him that this way of representation the norm almost inevitably excludes any variety and deviation from it.

Judith Butler, "Umdeuten" (1993)

It is this compulsiveness of the ´performative´ –and this refers to the form of simplification or ´stereotyping´ with which things show themselves to us, namely as natural and factually imagined contexts– that Judith Butler dealt with in her philosophical approach. Can we ever escape the normative power of what is communicated through media, and how? Do we not depend at the mercy of the reiteration of facts as facts and the obviousness and certainty with which we grasp them? Can we actually still be ourselves, if we only deal with facts that are not facts but "myths" and "marques" (traces), as Barthes and Derrida have already made clear, and are thus values permeated and proven by the dominant cultures, which automatically become the norm for us and thus the guideline for our actions? Do we always iterate only what has always been valid? In view of this finding, which Judith Butler uncovered with precise sharpness, can we still act independently? What possibilities do we actually have? The result of her research on this was that this can only be possible through "Umdeuten" (a reinterpretation) of the discourse that the alleged facts present to us. (Butler 1993, 128-129) A prerequisite for this is that we, as possible actors, become aware of the normative power of facts or the discourses hidden behind them and actively work on their reinterpretation. The "'instance' of action" lies precisely therein. (124-125, here 124) Without it we inscribe ourselves into the normative power of the discourses of 'facts', submit to them and iterate them continuously. We cannot then free ourselves from it. For Butler, this concern gains importance above all in social interaction, since the power of facts, for instance, ascribes to women their roles in society, and the (hidden) values lying within them are constantly iterated by themselves and by others, so that change is difficult or impossible. Only by actively reinterpreting existing discourses can we become capable of acting independently, she argued in the 90s in a lively exchange with leading women researchers in gender theory. [2]

With regard to the arts, the question arises of how we can escape the normative power of the facts that are constantly expressed in them? Karin Kneffel has already found an answer to this question in her series of Fruits, in which she creates perfect, beautiful fears deliberately idealization of peaches, grapes, apples, etc., which represent the power of reality we do not doubt, and in this respect, in fact, submit to its normative power. Our everyday buying behaviour is a mirror of this. The breeders and farmers conscientiously fulfil this wish. It is only with difficulty, with prolonged looking and finally by repeating the impression of the perfect pictures of the fruits against a neutral background that we are alienated. Something is

wrong. Karin Kneffel applies an artistic strategy here that Walter Benjamin just called "Chockwirkungen" (shock effects). Even more clearly than in the series of Fruits, such effects can be seen in the artist's more recent works, in which the deviations from reality (the "différance") are much more obvious, as can be shown.

One of these series, which I call Interiors, in which these deviations become irritatingly clear, is the work on *Haus Lange* and *Haus Ester* in Krefeld, which she began realizing in 2009 (fig. 4 -6). These are pictures in which Kneffel dealt with two neighbouring city villas built between 1928 and 1930 by Mies van der Rohe, who became in 1930 the last director of the Bauhaus in Berlin. Her interest in reproducing the interiors of these buildings as faithfully as possible in her paintings prompted her to conduct intensive research. (Cf. Voss 2019, 85-94) Original black-and-white photographs from the archives, interviews with the descendants and the collection of information about the Bauhaus and Mies van der Rohe in particular served this purpose. In addition, she worked intensively on the inventory, which included not only the furniture, which still appears just as modern today, but also the important collection of Expressionist art, especially at *Haus Lange*, whose presentation as a circulating system was realised by Lilly Reich, the partner of Mies van der Rohe (fig. 4-5). Among them were e.g. the art of August Macke, Renée Sintenis, Oskar Kokoschka, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wilhelm v. Lehmbruck, Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall, which at that time belonged to the avant-garde.

Kneffel's desire to reproduce everything as plausible and ´authentic´ as possible, as it looked, inspired her to examine, especially with regard to the latter, who owns the works today and where they hang (fig. 7). (Voss 2019, 86) In this way, she can give a faithful picture of their appearance. With regard to Kneffel's realized Interiors, they seem to fulfil this claim so authentically, which they in turn do not.



Figure 5: untitled (Haus Lange, Krefeld, living room), 2009,
four-part, oil on canvas, 1,80 x 5,20 m, Collection Heinz und Marianne Ebers-Stiftung.



Figure 6: untitled (Haus Lange, Krefeld, dining room), 2017/5,
oil on canvas, 1,80 x 2,40 m, private collection.



Figure 7: untitled (Marc Chagall, The Holy Coachman, 1911, Städel Museum Frankfurt a.M.), 2017/6, oil on canvas, 1,80 x 2,40 m, private collection.

For standing in front of them, these works always show us only those details in colour and clearly, of which she can tell exactly what they looked like; everything else blurs in brownish-grey tones, as the archive photographs show. This also applies, first of all, to the masterpieces of the visual arts (fig. 5). It is only in later versions that she reproduced them in colour, and this at the moment when, after thorough research, she knew with certainty their original colouring (fig. 6-7). Thus, even deviations in the hanging of Marc Chagall´s *The Holy Coachman* in Haus Lange and in the museum in Frankfurt's Städel were addressed in other works in the series (fig. 6-7). It is, after all, other details that cause lasting irritation. For both the red tulips and the sliced yellow shining lemons certainly do not belong to the original inventory. These irritations are intensified by further interventions, as the artist erects a transparent barrier directly in front of us. In the one case there seem to be drops on a window (fig. 5), in the other case reflections on blinds (fig. 6-7). Through them the light shines into the rooms and refracts itself accordingly in colour. As multiple refracted reflections the light is reflected at least in honey-coloured drops on the window pane, but also on the walls (fig. 5) as well as in the blinds and in the coloured round balloon-like reflections in the room (fig. 6-7). (Cf. also Voss 2019, 90-91)

These last aspects listed here speak of a completely different, divergent understanding. With them, it takes up less historically verifiable aspects than those that suggest subsequent events. This already includes the correction of the colouring of the hung works of art. Furthermore, she apparently also understands as important events that took place much later. In addition to the lemons, these include above all, the tulips that also appear in other series of the artist, and which she apparently added to when she was working on them herself. They are, so to speak, relics from 2009 and 2017 in the two Interiors discussed (fig. 5-6). This pattern of including later 'events' or aspects, also seems to apply to the windows and blinds. With them she indirectly involves us as current viewers. For we are the ones who stand behind the window pane and in front of the blinds, through which the light falls and brightens the rooms accordingly. To assume with reference to these pictures that they reconstruct an authentic picture of the situation from the years 1928-1930 proves to be wrong. The meticulous research, it turns out, always refers anew to the respective time in which an encounter took place. Accordingly, the artist's own additions from 2009 and 2017, and finally those in which we ourselves look into the rooms as through a window, change the respective view. Their ‘historical’ being changes continuously with each new insight and yet remains as a ‘marque’. The ‘reality’ of view is not fixed, it is in constant change by each of us in every moment.

Conclusion

'Anything Goes' As a Liberation From Determination

In the 'most beautiful' sense, provoked by the work of Karin Kneffel and inspired by the basic ideas of the philosophy of postmodernism or poststructuralism, one can say with Barthes that it is 'myths of everyday' to assume we ever see reality. This reality has always been changed or 'deformed' by reducing its meaning to simple facts or 'stereotypes', as we remember them or as we find them on a photograph in an archive. What we see, Kneffel shows, ´seem´ to be only facts, because 'in truth' we constantly enrich them with new meaning, so that the old one changes. This ever new sense cannot be neutral. In this respect the artist's favourite flowers, the tulips, change the view of the alleged interior according to her own taste. Later, we ourselves –through the barrier between us and the interior– are called upon to get involved in the process, for example, to recognize how much the style of the furniture from the Bauhaus period is still relevant today, and if not with me, then with friends and acquaintances. What we see has its own complex past that has something to do with us. We keep seeing this close bond with it, said Derrida. Her "marque" (trace) holds on to what we see and shapes our expectations and our actions. In this way, the meaning in the picture is constantly enriched anew by others, here by the artist, but also by ourselves. It is constantly changing and affects the future. We will not find reality as such, as Kneffel shows us with her work. And yet we all firmly believe that is reality. Then what is reality?

Thus, despite or perhaps because of Karin Kneffel's meticulous research –a convincing form of artistic research– it was and is not possible to uncover this reality, but only to show "marques" (traces) of it. With the help of "Chockwirkungen" (shock effects), Kneffel shows us the "différance" with which she simultaneously refers to the 'myths of everyday' that we are constantly confronted with. This strategy makes it possible for her to uncover and thus deconstruct this apparent nature of the 'facts'. It is a form of "Umdeuten" (reinterpreting) and thus a new occupation, as Butler suggested as a method. The new sense that frees itself from the hegemony of the traditional and allows new versions and perspectives then emerges. The changed perspectives that these ever show us redeem us from the supposed facts. The reward for this is –instead of an apparently objective truth, for example about what is beautiful– richness and diversity, whose roots lie in ourselves: "Everything can be beautiful", Karin Kneffel said in the end of the conversation in October 10, 2019.

The accusation of 'anything goes', i.e. of arbitrariness, which is recognizable in Kneffel's statement, and which has been and still is just as often reproached of postmodernism, must finally be countered in principle: the greater danger lies fundamentally in the normative. For it calls upon all those who are bound to it to measure all things or even people by it, who as a rule only rarely meet the norm. Beauty, thus understood as a norm, can then exert considerable pressure on each individual. The peach or apple must look like this, otherwise it won't sell, or else I don't want it. Producer and buyer are under pressure caused by the standards. Standards turn out to be determinations. Applied to us away from things, the postulate of beauty has a similarly restrictive effect. The cult of ideal proportions of body and face puts women and men equally under pressure. Allowing variety and richness is one form of response to this, but it takes a lot of strength to resist the pressure of the norm. Another, less passive, lies in actively reinterpreting Kneffel's handling of the 'historical' Interiors speak of this. In an uncomplicated and playful way, they change the image of history, show its relativity and thus take away its ´given´ certainty, which proves to be liberating.

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With heartfelt thanks to the artist Karin Kneffel
for granting the picture rights and templates for the print.

Notes:

[1] In a conversation on October 10, 2019 Karin Kneffel confirmed this assumption by saying that she once painted rotten spots in fruit and that others had concluded that her artistic goal was to symbolize Vanitas or the transience of life. That means that she with her work shows us the cycle of life in which we grow like fruits, reach our climax and then die. But that, Kneffel concluded, was not her goal. Since then, she has refrained from painting rotten spots in fruit.

[2] This remarkable and renowned discussion between Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell and Nancy Fraser was edited and first published in German In *Der Streit um Differenz. Feminismus der Postmoderne in der Gegenwart.* Fischer: Frankfurt a. M. 1993 and later translated into English: Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange (Thinking Gender). Routledge: Abingdon 1995.