

## **Gabriele Horndasch: Kigilser Penön**

Speech manuscript by Doris Krystof for the opening of the exhibition at Kunstverein Brühl on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Good evening  
and welcome!  
I am delighted  
to say a few words  
at the opening of  
Gabriele Horndasch's exhibition  
"Kigilser Penön".

Or perhaps I should say:

oodG ningEve  
adwen lemco!  
Ide gham lited  
feto sawards woy  
theat ning ofope  
Hexborn Gition abriehile's dasch  
„König Pilsener“<sup>1</sup>.

... When reflecting on Gabriele Horndasch's installations of decommissioned and found neon lettering that the artist has been making for the last three or four years the viewer is quickly encouraged to continue the game of "deranged" letters. Just like Scrabble, it's fun to transpose, shift or swap the smallest units of language that carry meaning (i.e. letters), until other, new words are formed. In contrast to the strict rules of Scrabble, in art these words can be meaningless. They are even purposely fashioned until all existing meaning is lost and a new meaning is created: twisted, distorted, scrambled and sometimes seemingly bewitched. Everybody is familiar with these games (the German language is well-suited for it): You take a word, remove one letter, swap two, exchange a third and you have a new word: "Kigilser Penön".

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<sup>1</sup> König Pilsener is a German brand of beer.

Although the famous beer that is the basis of these two words is now barely recognisable, a new, wonderful Turkish-sounding word has been created, a word that, at least up till now, has absolutely no meaning. (In fact, a Google search of “Kigilser Penön” returns nothing other than hits on an artist who studied sculpture at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf where she now lives and works i.e. Gabriele Horndasch, the Kunstverein Brühl and this event tonight).

“Dass er höre”, which translates as “that he listen”, is the second object constructed from neon lettering. It too was made recently and is exhibited here for the first time. Behind this clearly German and somewhat cumbersome conditional clause is hidden yet another brand of beer: Hasseröder is less well-known than Königs Pilsener (I believe) but through radio and television advertising is sufficiently anchored in the collective memory. “Dass er höre” – when dwelling on the literary dimensions of this laconically brief request (that is almost a sigh) or when recollecting other Horndasch works based on language games (please check out the works “Schadenschnelldienst”<sup>2</sup> or “Die Zeitgenossin genoss die Zeit”<sup>3</sup> and many more in the artist’s extensive online archive!), when taking into consideration Gabriele Horndasch’s undeniable inclination to language, one could almost think that it’s the work of a sentimental lyricist, a subtle poet and language artist who, with her letter sculptures, is joining the ranks of a long artistic tradition reaching as far back as cubism. That is not incorrect, but in my opinion, Gabriele Horndasch is interested in something other than that which 20<sup>th</sup> Century language criticism and philosophy described so prominently as the “lingualisation of the fine arts”.

What this referred to was the realisation of the arbitrariness of linguistic signs, i.e. the insight that there is a difference between signs and things signified: “Kigilser Penön”. In 1928, René Magritte wrote underneath his carefully painted picture of a pipe, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe* and, in so doing, made it clear once and for all that the picture of a pipe was not actually a pipe but indeed a picture of a pipe. The consequences of this were huge, not only for semiotics, epistemology and visual, media, and representation theory but also for modern art. “Bilder werden Worte” (English: Images become words), the title of an influential book by the German art historian and theorist Wolfgang Iser, summed up the increasing verbalisation of images in a single concept while simultaneously establishing the iconisation or visualisation of literature. It would be going too far to elaborate here, therefore just this

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<sup>2</sup> English: Express Repair Service

<sup>3</sup> In German a play on words, in English it simply translates to “The [female] contemporary enjoyed the time”

much: ranging from Marcel Broodthaers to concept art and Jenny Holzer or Harald Klingelhöller (to name another obvious Düsseldorf example) there is a wide spectrum of artists who work with text, typography, letters, sentences and who constantly re-explore the complex classification system that is language.

For language is a classification system (albeit an ever-changing one). That is the fascination of all artistic experiments with language, which constantly seek out the boundaries of language, of what can be said and communicated. This is how the French philosopher Jacques Derrida can be interpreted in *Of Grammatology* (1967), when he states: “The advent of writing is the advent of this play”. For the use of text and language in artworks often deliberately aims at confusing the system or in the words of Marcel Broodthaers “poetry as disruption of the world order, poetry as an indirect political question”. In any case, the visual arts have always taken advantage of being able to visually represent such disruptions of order through the displacement, dislocation and spatialisation of text.

This takes us back to König Pilsener and to Gabriele Horndasch’s showplace of language and text, to her idea of the disruption of order. This can also be seen in her series of painted over record covers installed on the wall in a row between the two neon letter objects. On the record covers are figurative and textual motifs that, except for the smallest remnants, are almost completely concealed by a cursory layer of white paint, leaving only visible a necktie, a bikini and the two words “bessere Sex” (English: better sex), the letters of which have been isolated from their background.

A key factor in Gabriele Horndasch’s artworks is that she, in a sense, works with and against the classification system language. But there is another factor integral to the objects made of neon lettering: something strong, visual and at times almost theatrical and performative. To all intents and purposes language is represented here in a pictorial manner, as a materialised, constructed and designed object or ready-made. Text appears as form and colour in space – and if the power supply is cut off it disappears again. To reverse the title of Wolfgang Iser’s book, one could say in light of Gabriele Horndasch’s neon objects: words become images. For in her case the visual form far outweighs the spoken or written language. The fact that the well-known beer König Pilsener is behind “Kigilser Penön” cannot be heard. But you see it immediately. The gently swung white font of the corporate signature is so thoroughly aimed at recognition that even as a non-beer drinker it is easily identifiable. The significant

broken typography of the luminescent red Hasseröder logo with its hooks and claws inspired by old German Gothic type emphasizes form and colour so that the word as such is well and truly outshone by the text object with all its nostalgic reminiscences.

To conclude, it could be said that in Gabriele Horndasch's works the synthesis of different approaches are brought about. Whereas the lyricist Gabriele Horndasch writes her texts with the relicts of decommissioned neon lettering, the sculptor Gabriele Horndasch uses the specific forms of letters to produce large-scale installations that evoke a culture of advertising that is almost traditional these days. It is an archive of letters that once radiated with neon light but has since become obsolete, that once belonged to the insignia of a modern city. These letter constructs, carefully formed according to the principles of advertising psychology, are usually overlooked. For the most part, they are hung far too high and are merely noticed in passing, skimmed over – and yet, and that is the intention, they are firmly anchored in our minds. Gabriele Horndasch's artistic concept is to redress the balance between the peripheral and obtrusive qualities inherent in neon signs by dismantling and shifting them to another place such as an exhibition space. Through the diverse strategies of alienation the letters undergo a process of ennoblement and language appears as a signal, a sigh, a statue, a game.