

Zurich, June 2013

Press release: Shadow Journeys. Etchings by Peter Bräuninger
21 August – 18 October 2013

Opening: 20 August 2013, at 6 p.m.

People have always been captivated by the obscure. Somewhere between beguiling enchantment on the one hand and a shiver of the uncanny on the other, the world of shadows is a seemingly endless source of artistic inspiration. Whether celebrating the fullness of life in the sheltering lap of lustful night, as in the Baroque, or succumbing to the fascination of metaphysical evil in gloomy Hymns to Night, as in the Romantic era, this multi-faceted theme appeals as much to artists today as it ever did in the past.

Peter Bräuninger (born 1948) has devoted himself entirely to the atmospheric celebration of a magical world of shadows in his work: nocturnal streets and harbours alternate with dark and melancholy interiors; the indoor life of his own studio with its crepuscular nooks and crannies is registered and illuminated with the same keen curiosity as the vibrant red light district outside his window. Often, this aesthetic penchant for the abyss of the night melds with the elements of a *film noir* in evocative visual formulae of impending doom that might have been borrowed from Alfred Kubin, while the harsh contrasts recall the shady urban scenes of Edward Hopper. The individual stands lonely and forlorn, with his few paltry belongings, waiting. The destination of his journey remains unclear – as in the 1989 etching from which the exhibition takes its title.

Peter Bräuninger himself has been journeying incessantly for some forty years, commuting regularly between Zurich, Genova and Hamburg since the 1970s, with occasional lengthy stays in the USA and Paris. For more than forty years, on his travels, he has been tirelessly producing exquisite aquatint etchings with a hyperrealism redolent of black and white photography. He honed these consummate skills at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Zurich as a student of Bruno Stamm. The focus there during the early 1970s, in keeping with the spirit of the times, was very much on precise observation, spawning a new form of Realism as a counterpoint to the largely relativising aspects of Conceptualism. In Bräuninger's case, this evolved into a fantastical approach to which he has remained true ever since. This approach was fully vindicated by his early success. The resoundingly positive response to his work culminated in a solo exhibition at the Kunstmuseum Winterthur in 1980, followed by countless critically acclaimed presentations in galleries at home and abroad right up to the present day. What had begun as the reflection of an openly admitted apocalyptic mood, or *weltuntergangsstimmung*, critical of the existing system, gradually gave way to an exuberant love of storytelling. Today, for the most part, his works depict scenes of carefully orchestrated complexity that betray an engagingly mischievous view of reality. A smattering of finely calibrated disruptive aspects prompt the viewer to take a closer look in order to glimpse the bold visions they convey: in the 1980s, for example, Bräuninger portrayed heavy-duty offshore cranes against the backdrop of Letten railway station in Zurich. The painstaking process of etching the metal plates, enhancing the line drawing with layer after layer of aquatint, demands an extraordinary degree of spatially abstract, even "theatrical" thinking. And in this respect, he can undoubtedly be described as a master of dramatic chiaroscuro. What is more, he actually prints his own etchings – and while this is most unusual, it does have a reason: Bräuninger models his "night pieces" step by step on the copper plate, in several processes.

The exhibition shows a representative selection of about 80 works from the artist's copious archives. It not only provides a retrospective view of his oeuvre from the earliest experiments to the latest works, but also gives an insight into his studio by including drawings and sketchbooks in addition to the etchings themselves. Bräuninger tends to capture his motifs in situ either in pencil or gouache before translating them into the form of detailed templates. In this regard, he upholds the tradition of the architectural fantasies created by Giovanni Battista Piranesi in which given objects are subsequently transposed into unexpected contexts and combined anew with a sure aesthetic sense. Or did we already have an inkling that there were mysterious dungeons hidden deep below Zurich's main train station?

For further information and visuals:

Alexandra Barcal, curator of the exhibition, tel. 044/632 78 76 or barcal@gs.ethz.ch

The exhibition will be accompanied by a detailed illustrated publication: *Peter Bräuninger – Schattenreisen - Radierungen*, with texts by Alexandra Barcal, Peter Kane Dufault and Martin Schaub, Hamburg/Baltimore: Achilla Presse, 2013; c. 300 pages, with c. 270 colour illustrations, CHF 48.-, ISBN 978-3-940350-21-3.