



OFFSCREEN

Benjamin Heisenberg

Twelve Angry Men

(*Die zwölf Geschworenen*)

16.–20.10.2024

Grand Garage Haussmann

43-45 Rue de Laborde, 75008 Paris, France

The installation *Twelve Angry Men (Die Zwölf Geschworenen)*

Benjamin Heisenberg's installation *Twelve Angry Men (Die Zwölf Geschworenen)* scrutinises the imprint and self-image of German society by means of a video cycle, pictorial works and a group of readymades. In this work, Heisenberg condenses his many years of artistic research into collective and personal truth, the intergenerational transmission of traumas and positive collective certainties and their potential for visual representation.

Benjamin Heisenberg was born in Tübingen in 1974 and lives and works in Lucerne. In addition to the family of the nuclear physicist Heisenberg, the artist is descended on his mother's side from the von Weizsäcker and Eulenburg families, who played a decisive role in German history of the 20th century.

Heisenberg studied fine arts at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and feature film directing at the University of Television and Film in Munich. He is co-founder of the film magazine *Revolver* and teaches in international film- and art schools. The gallery has represented the artist since 2010 and his works have been shown at the ZKM Karlsruhe, the Haus der Kunst Munich; the Cannes Film Festival and the Berlin International Film Festival; the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; the Videonale Bonn; the MoMA, New York; and permanently at the NS Documentation Centre, Munich. He has been honoured with the First Steps Award; several times with the Max Ophüls Film Prize; the Bavarian Culture Prize; the Bavarian Film Prize; the Culture Prize of the City of Würzburg and the Austrian Film Prize.

Description of the film

The installation *Twelve Angry Men (Die Zwölf Geschworenen)* consists of a series of suitcases and boxes, all of which come from the attic of Benjamin Heisenberg's grandmother's and great-grandmother's house. The suitcases contain a complete court uniform from the imperial era, wrapped in a newspaper from 8 May 1916, a Wehrmacht uniform, wrapped in a newspaper from 1945 and various envelopes and newspapers, with which the partially empty boxes are lined. One wooden box contains carefully wrapped letters that have been artfully overgrown by a wasps' nest. The artist himself has added a small blue clothes box containing his private riding uniform, wrapped in a newspaper from 12 September 2001, depicting the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre.

In very different ways, the found objects tell a story of war and warlike events in German and international history of the 20th century, which left their mark on Heisenberg's personal and family history and in which Heisenberg's relatives sometimes played decisive roles. The artist describes his own suitcase with a riding uniform and reference to 9/11/2001 'as a reference to the first moment in my life that subjectively felt like the approach of a great war was possible.'



The twelve 'jury members', small metal 'men' with a magnifying glass for a head, are also modern artefacts. They are originally used as tools for soldering cable connections. According to Heisenberg, they represent his own inner personas, which unabashedly search through the history of his family in order to understand and develop and grow. They make connections through time and habitual references and invite the viewer to look through them, so to speak, at the artefacts. The title *Twelve Angry Men* also refers to Sidney Lumet's feature film, which had a formative influence on Heisenberg, in which a jury's swift verdict of death is ultimately transformed into an acquittal of the defendant in a trial characterised by painstaking debate and discussion.

Heisenberg describes The Wasp's Nest as a 'natural structure erected by a collective of living beings, which can be understood as a visual condensation of the will to survive, family coexistence, time and labour and devotion. It has grown in an amorphous form over the letters written by people, captures them and could be perceived as a symbol of how experience becomes history in an unpredictable process and can be both preserved and forgotten.

Heisenberg adds a commentary to the artefacts in four videos, which essayistically deal with four terms that Heisenberg associates with the history of the last century in Germany: Manipulation, Fiction, Faith and Romanticism. All the films are made from Super8 and video material that is closely related to him or his friends and partly refers to his private past.

Heisenberg: 'I sometimes compare the inner, positive and negative imprints passed on from generation to generation with derivatives of a mathematical curve. One generation interprets the experiences and expressions of the previous one and thus arrives at new insights and altered deformations. Through the juxtaposition and contextualisation of the artefacts, I try to develop a pictorial feeling for the time, the people back then and my relationship to them. The small figures bend over the exhibited artefacts as if they could raise objections, examine evidence. Showing compassion and visualising continuities and ruptures between generations.'

For the Artist, this raises a wide range of questions that are more relevant today than ever in an uncertain world situation: Do we pass on our responsibility, our idiosyncrasies, our 'skeletons in the closet' and our achievements personally, socially? How secure are we in our emotional and lived values when complex decisions are required in actual action? To what extent has the general medialisation and fictionalisation already obscured an adequate feeling for the internal and external wars of our present and the last century? How do we behave today and what do the constantly emerging narratives and traumas mean as continuities of our societies?

The development of personal answers to these questions is an ongoing active process that has accompanied Heisenberg for many years and characterises his work. *Twelve Angry Men (Die zwölf Geschworenen)* condenses this search in the fascinating historical artefacts in a radically personal way.