

# Der Bund

## Burn, Bruno, Burn!

by Ewa Hess  
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The solemn sculpture-lighting. Bruno Bischofberger behind the figure of his wife, Christine Bischofberger right, Vito Schnabel watching. Photo: Photo Swiss press / Cattaneo

Dear Readers, I revert to the opening of Vito Schnabel's new gallery in St.Moritz. My, b`ut what has already been written about it! As if high snobiety does parties not art. Not true. The vernissage thoroughly enlightened me in terms of art. How else could it be? Above all hovered Bruno Bischofberger's presence - who exemplarily exhibits what an unconditional commitment to art can mean at all.

Here in Switzerland we are perfectly familiar with Urs Fischer, seeing as gallerist Eva Presenhuber represented the artist from very early on. We experienced the first astounding installations of this jack-of-all-trades at the Kunsthauus Glarus, and the Kunsthauus Zürich also put his ability to command large rooms with a confident gesture to the test early on. Ok, the burning sculptures depicting the artist's friends are nothing new. However, by honoring Bruno Bischofberger and his wife Christine (who is called Yoyo) with such a burning sculpture, Schnabel and Fischer are doing everything right. Such a reverence could not be more earned.

Bischofberger opened his first gallery in Zürich in 1963, and only a few years later he presented American pop art. He showed works by Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Tom Wesselmann. He introduced Warhol to the big collectors, Philippe Niarchos or Peter Brant for example. Bischofberger

and Brant were the financial force behind Warhol's "Interview". Warhol and Bischofberger were bound by a kind of symbiosis, as he advised the artist in many respects, even in terms of the constitution of his works. He also had the right of first refusal, which he made good use of, if one considers his immense Warhol collection. To many artists after (for instance Jean-Michel Basquiat or Vito's father Julian Schnabel) he was a friend, advisor, encourager. They went in and out at his home, his and Yoyo's house was a home to them. Artists became godparents of Bischofberger's children - Warhol was Magnus', Jean Tinguely was Nina's, who today is an architect and who built Bischofberger's new private museum in Männedorf.

Born in Appenzell, Bischofberger wrote his thesis at the University of Zurich on Swiss folk art, which he collects to this day. His understanding of contemporary art, which is somehow anarchic and primal, is in my opinion related to his early fascination with the mythical folk customs of the mountains.

No wonder then, that Bischofberger was one of the first to open a gallery in St.Moritz. So if the winter resort now grows into a veritable place of power in terms of art, as we could see happening this year, then it also thanks to the big BB. In this respect it is a wholly correct gesture of Vito Schnabel's to reenact the godfather of

art in his first exhibition. He could, by the way, very well be Vito's godfather too, as his father Julian Schnabel was an artist of the gallery and a frequent guest at the Bischofberger home, so that the young Schnabel knew the gallerist from an early age and, as he tells me, greatly admired him.

Bischofberger visibly enjoyed the fun around "his" candle sculpture at the opening. He was a bit injured, that is why he sat near the sculptures with his crutches and smiled blissfully, so much so that one could have imagined that a shining rainbow was also apparent on his face. Urs Fischer dipped the sculpture of the couple in such a rainbow - possibly a reference to the love of all sorts of rainbows in pop art. His wife Yoyo had a mishap - she burned her hand during the celebratory lighting of her husband. After that, she gave everyone a cold hand in greeting, as she let an ice cube melt to ease the burn.

Urs Fischer's new pictures - eyes overpainted with thick, pastose paint and then reproduced as a photograph - were able to give the small room the intensity that the artist always seeks. They asserted themselves even in the midst of the large vernissage crowd. Looking and painting - two complementary acts that are innately familiar to all human beings, concentrated to one strong code - Urs Fischer at his very own.

Sterling Ruby, 42, an American shooting star from Pasadena, has similarly taken the cake in a commander style with his Stoves in front of the Kulm Hotel. These are two rough companions, simultaneously sculptures and functioning wood-burning stoves, cast in iron and equipped with high chimneys. At the vernissage a fire burned within these - at the same time threatening and warming, these black monsters raise archaic feelings in the midst of the mountains. One could almost forget the many luxury hotels by which one is surrounded.

In the run-up to the opening there was a lot of gossip about the gallerist's bride, Heidi Klum, and she was there, but not only her. Many other interesting guests came, the kind that stand out from the crowd by virtue of their minds. For instance the Vanity-Fair author Bob Colacello, who feels that his republicanism is being spoiled by the current presidential campaign - he is ashamed for one of their candidates. Need I say more? Or the choreographer William Forsythe, whose daughter Sara is managing the gallery. The actress Maria Furtwängler came a bit later, and Urs Fischer was there, even if he - as often - didn't mingle with the vernissage guests. I can understand him well - the role of the artist at his own vernissage is always a bit awkward. Why would guests do anything but praise him? In any case: I would have, and not just out of politeness.



Sterling Rubys «Stoves» vor der grandiosen Bergkulisse. Foto: FSP/Cattaneo