



Henry Wabel , Stilleben mit Kinderzeichnung , 1954

The Phantom of the Authentic

I was driving with my car on a curvy road in the mountains.

The road was empty, no traffic at all, it felt like everybody was staying at home.

I tried, by using the technique of cutting the curves, to make a straight line with the car, trying to hold the steering wheel always in the same position. The more I tried, the more successful I became. And in the end I was able to drive in a perfectly straight line on that curvy road.

Shortly after this, and before my best friend boredom was able to suggest anything else for me, my friend Kaspar called and told me about the new paintings he wanted to do. As I understood it, his idea was to restage some Frottages that his nice and sweet kids had done a few days earlier.

He asked me if I would write a short text about it. He insisted that I didn't have to do this as a return favor. And it was, actually, by addressing the topic of the return favor that I wanted to proceed. But how?

More or less immediately I had to think of a painting by Henry Wabel, "Stilleben mit Kinderzeichnung." I remembered seeing this painting around 1969 in the collection of the Museum in my hometown. I was 18 or 19 years old at the time, and starting to think more and look more and more at art. Conceptual art was a new and fresh thing. So it was through the eyes of that momentum that I saw this painting – the idea of that painting as a conceptual art work. I was enthusiastic about it, about the thoughts I was seeing in it. Everything was there – a kind of appropriation art "avant la lettre," a readymade inside a painting, the question of authorship and on top of it the questionable phantom idea of the authentic. I was, as they say, "illuminated" by this painting.

Time passed, I forgot about the painting and illumination was turning back into a dim bulb. I had to go back and do some research because I couldn't even remember the name of the artist. During this little research, I stumbled across another painting, done a long time ago, like 500 years ago, by Giovanni Francesco Caroto.

Dear Kaspar, I am sure you will like that painting as much as I do.

- and - is there a hidden answer in it, addressing the distorted echo of the question: How can we reanimate the maybe dead body of contemporary art?

- and - in doing so, are we just feeding the rat-race with provisory camouflaged simulacra, for a rat race that takes place in the sewer system of Late Capitalism? I can see you rolling your eyes and whimpering "oh no..."

Or, instead, should we spend the rest of our days trying to make a car drive a straight line on a curvy mountain road?

Peter Fischli



Giovanni Francesco Caroto , Knabe mit Kinderzeichnung, 1520