

# Two Paintings and a Book

About the installation "*These goddamned boys all stealing*" (2008) for the exhibition Urban Traces in Berlin

For the exhibition "Urban Traces" in the office premises of Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP—an international law firm specialized on commercial and economic law—NKL produced an installation entitled "These goddamned boys all stealing"(2008). The Berlin office is situated in 21<sup>st</sup> floor of the highest office building of "Friedrichstraße" in the center of Berlin, Mitte. The elevated sight out of one the conference rooms over the western part of Berlin has been a natural context for the installation. The aim was a subtle contrasting of this panoramic view due to social ranks and economical power and a more detailed vision of the city. Out of the vertical distance the historical depth of the urban space remains invisible. Thus, the concrete visuals testifying the past of urban life by traces of World War II as like hackneyed vulgarities has been brought up into the 21<sup>st</sup> floor to install a micro vision of the city by showing one of the many lost stories of this city which remain cross-linked to the present time.

The installation consists of two paintings, a diptych that shows traces of World War II and vis-à-vis a single painting repeating the same figure: the vulgar representation of a "prick". On the conference table between these two paintings an exemplar of "Christopher and his kind"—the Berlin memories of Christopher Isherwood published in 1976—was displayed. The title of the single painting and the whole installation "These goddamned boys all stealing" is a quotation out of this book. It refers to the coincidence that the iterated figure was found at "Zossenerstrasse 7" on the wall of the same building that became important in

Isherwoods autobiography and to the Berlin he experienced during his stay between the two World Wars.

Like the book on the conference table showed that a bar called “The Cosi Corner” existed from 1920 to 1930 at this place. Some underscored lines emphasize how Isherwood experienced the bar and its clientele. To insiders the bar was known as a place frequented by homosexual men. Isherwood describes how he discovered his homosexuality in Berlin and how he met “Bubi the Boxer”, his first great affection, in the Cosi Corner. Here are three quotations out of Isherwoods autobiography:

*I can still make myself faintly feel the delicious nausea of initiation terror which Christopher felt as Wystan pushed back the heavy leather door-curtain of a boy bar called Cosy Corner ... he met a youth whom I shall call Bubi ... pretty face, appealing blue eyes, golden blond hair ... a body smooth-skinned and hairless, although hard and muscular ... Bubi had been, among other things, a boxer, so he must have been capable of aggression. But with Christopher he was gentle, considerate, almost too polite.*

*Nothing could have looked less decadent than The Cosy Corner (Zossenerstrasse 7). It was plain and homely and unpretentious. Its only decorations were a few photographs of boxers and racing cyclists, pinned up above the bar. It was heated by a big old-fashioned iron stove. Partly because of the great heat of this stove, partly because they knew it excited their clients ... the boys stripped off their sweaters or leather jackets and sat around with their shirts unbuttoned to the navel and their sleeves rolled up to the armpits.*

They were all working-class and mostly all out of work ... They were greedy but not calculating ... When they stole they stole stupidly and got caught ... Beyond keeping their hair carefully combed, they showed few signs of vanity ... Their attitude was an almost indifferent “Take me or leave me”.

Nowadays, the memory of this place is fading out. The rooms are out of use and the only attraction on the walls outside seems to be quite recent: it is the engraved penis reproduced by NKL to contextualize the visual material of her painting.

The opposite wall of the conference room was covered by the diptych showing the imprints of a wall in the street called “Am Kupfergraben” near to the apartment of Angela Merkel, the first female German chancellor. It shows the traces of bullets and street fights which happened presumably near the end of World War II. Regarding to this historical context, which is already legibly in the “Urban Traces” of the Berlin city NKL assembled the mechanical cloned pricks in order to the visual gravity of the diptych. The arrangement recalls the flights of V2-rockets or Avro Lancaster Bombers over the English Channel. Finally, “These goddamned boys all stealing” reminds us of a burning rainbow over the Berlin history.

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